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UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

MICHEL TREMBLAY'S WOMEN AND THEIR QUEST FOR A SUCCESSFUL ESCAPE

BY

JAMES SIMON ©

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree MASTER OF ARTS.

DEPARTMENT OF DRAMA

Edmonton, Alberta
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FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled MICHEL TREMBLAY'S WOMEN AND THEIR QUEST FOR A SUCCESSFUL ESCAPE submitted by JAMES SIMON in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree MASTER OF ARTS.

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ABSTRACT

Michel Tremblay burst onto the Quebec theatre scene in 1968 with the first production of his _Les Belles Soeurs_. First a provincial figure then a national one, Tremblay has grown into a writer of international acclaim. His plays have been translated and performed in many countries. His work has proven its timeless quality and has transcended its initial ties to Quebec society.

The majority of Tremblay's plays centre on female characters. His depiction of lower-class Quebecois women is unflattering, yet painfully accurate. Many ideas and themes come to the forefront in different offerings, but the theme of escape, especially of women trying to escape from their situation in life or from themselves is a mainstay in the thematic structure of his work.

In _Les Belles Soeurs_, _Bonjour, là, Bonjour_, _Damnée Manon, Sacrée Sandra_, _The Impromptu of Outremont_, and _Albertine in Five Times_ Tremblay illustrates that the common routes chosen by most Quebecois women to gain an escape from their lives prove to be unsuccessful. Outside forces provide only temporary relief to Tremblay's women; permanent relief, they discover, is hard to find in the claustrophobic, trap-like world of lower-class east-end Montreal. Ultimately Tremblay reveals that only by accepting oneself and trusting oneself can a true escape be achieved.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION: CLIMATE OF THE TIMES

THE TURBULENT 1960'S IN QUEBEC:

Michel Tremblay emerged as one of the most innovative and influential playwrights of the late 1960's. His work has been performed worldwide, and his thematic message understood through cultural barriers. Never one to rest on past laurels, Michel Tremblay continues to write plays. Almost fifty years old, he is still exploring new thematic issues and experimenting with different theatrical conventions.

Michel Tremblay was born on June 25, 1942. The son of a linotype operator, Armand Tremblay, and his wife, Rhéauna Rathier, Tremblay grew up in a lower-class section of Montreal. At thirteen years old he was awarded a scholarship to a Montreal classical school for high I.Q. children. Annoyed by the exclusive character of the school, Tremblay opted to return to a public secondary school. In 1959 he followed his father's example and became a linotype operator. It was in this same year that he wrote his first play, Le Train. Five years later this play won first prize at a contest for young writers on Radio-Canada television. In 1966 Tremblay wrote Cinq, six one-act plays performed by the Mouvement Contemporain troupe and directed by André Brassard. Brassard, in later years, would direct the original French productions of Tremblay's work. (1)

The 1960's proved to be fertile ground for Tremblay.

His radical themes and staging methods coincided with the political, social, and cultural upheavals occuring in the Quebec way of life. The period in Quebec history from which Michel Tremblay emerged was turbulent. During the 1960's, Quebec was involved in a heavy conflict centering on its language and culture. French-speaking Quebec was starting to speak out and demand that its voice be heard.

From 1936 to 1959, Maurice Duplessis, a conservative and traditionalist, held power in Quebec. He granted large concessions to American and English-Canadian firms after World War Two, making these two parties the controlling bodies of Quebec's natural resources. Duplessis held that industry should be developed by outsiders so as not to interfere with rural farm life of the French Canadians. The French, however, ignored Duplessis, left their farms, and flocked to the cities, thus contributing to the rapid economic growth of Quebec. Duplessis resisted this urbanization and thus made no attempt to legislate fair treatment of workers. The result was the emergence of protest groups and labour movements who denounced Duplessis' economic and labour policies, and advocated a new spirit of reform. The labour movement's most notable action in the Duplessis era was the Asbestos Strike of 1949. In this strike the miners at Thetford Mines and Asbestos defied government authority by illegally striking for better working conditions and wages. Duplessis employed repressive tactics to suppress the strike. (2) French-speaking Quebecers, representing the majority of the province's population, were standing up and challenging the tactics employed by their provincial government. Quebec was their province and they refused to be dominated by a government-protected minority.

Rebellion by the French-speaking majority was not solely confined to the fields of politics and labour. In 1948, a group of painters and writers led by Paul-Emile Borduas wrote and distributed a manifesto: "Réfus Global" (Total Refusal), which denounced the clerical repression and the narrow-mindedness of the social and political system. It called for freedom of expression in the artistic field. Many of those who signed the critique were harshly rebuked by educational, religious, and political groups who were not about to let their authority be questioned. (3) The seeds for a strong rebellion were planted. The Quebecois population was beginning to question the old strongholds of government and the Church. The 1940's and 1950's saw the planting of the seeds that would come to fruition in the 1960's. It is this period, the turbulent 1960's, from which Michel Tremblay emerged.

The 1960's saw the growth of working-class consciousness and an increase in labour militancy. In 1960, Jean Lesage led his Liberals to an election win with the campaign slogan "Il faut que ça change" (Things must change). In 1962 Lesage won again, this time with a new campaign slogan: "Maîtres chez nous" (Masters in our own House). In that same year the first big nationalist demonstration of the 1960's occured in front of the Canadian National Railways head office in downtown Montreal. A few hundred students were protesting the C.N.R.'s policy of not hiring French-speaking senior executives. The students burned a Canadian red ensign flag and an effigy of C.N.R. president Donald Gordon. (4) Reforms introduced by the Lesage government shaped today's Quebec. In 1966, when Daniel Johnson and the Union Nationale swept past Lesage's Liberals, they continued, in a more moderate way, the reforms that Lesage and his government had instigated. (5) This period, from 1960 to 1966, during which Lesage pushed Quebec forward into the modern era, is known as Quebec's Quiet Revolution.

The early 1960's saw the founding of the "Front de Libération Québecois" (F.L.Q.), a radical separatist group with a violent streak. In 1963, the F.L.Q. started its campaign of violence using arson, but soon turned to bombs to support demands for the secession of Quebec from Canada. The bombings continued until 1970, with explosions going off at Loyola College, McGill University, the Montreal and Canadian stock exchanges, the Queen's Printer bookstore, and outside the homes of Montreal business leaders. Mailboxes, federal government offices, and Liberal party offices were other targets. (6)

While the political and social worlds of Quebec were undergoing changes, so was the world of culture. Cultural development was becoming interrelated in Quebec to history, politics, and economics. The government's involvement in cultural affairs increased. Federally, the government set up a National Theatre School of Canada in Montreal with separate French- and English-language sections. Provincially, Lesage's Liberals established a Ministry of Cultural Affairs and named Georges Lapalme to the post in 1961. In 1963, a theatre section headed by Guy Beaulne was added. (7) The dominance of the English minority, as upheld by Duplessis, was rapidly crumbling, giving way to the rightful majority - the Québecois themselves.

In 1962, the government-subsidized organization L'Association Canadienne du Théâtre d'Amateurs sponsored the first annual festival in which one-act plays were given special attention. In 1963, the Ministry of Cultural Affairs sponsored a new theatre company, Théâtre Populaire du Québec, whose mandate was to tour Quebec, New Brunswick, Ontario, and New England. The company was made up of graduates of the Conservatoire d'art dramatique; its contribution to cultural exchange outside Quebec, and to decentralization within the province, was worth the investment. In 1964 the Nouvelle Compagnie Théâtrale was established by Francoise Graton, Gilles Pelletier, and

Georges Groulx. The company's repertoire of mostly foreign playwrights included Corneille, Shakespeare, Chekhov, and Steinbeck. The Nouvelle Compagnie Théâtrale created an ongoing educational program and a commitment to the development of theatre in Quebec. In 1964, Théâtre du Quat'Sous, a company with roots in amateur drama festivals, presented its first professional production. Théâtre du Quat'Sous, in the years to come, would produce many of Michel Tremblay's plays. (8) The new body of work that was being created by Michel Tremblay and his contemporaries now had a place where it could be heard and seen. Workshops of new plays and public readings were funded by these new companies, who in turn were funded by the Quebec government. If politics, economics, and social conditions were to be controlled by the new-age Quebec government, then so was culture.

In 1965, the Centre d'essai des auteurs dramatiques (Experimental Centre for Dramatists) was founded by a group headed by Robert Gurik. The mandate of the organization was to encourage playwriting and promote the production of original Quebec plays. The CEAD organized round-table discussions of new plays and, when possible, public readings with professional actors. It published many of the plays presented at these readings and encouraged other houses to publish in the field as well. In 1965, it began a library of all new plays received by the office. In recent years the CEAD has actively promoted Quebec plays throughout Canada and Europe. Antoine Maillet, Jean Barbeau, Michel Garneau, and Michel Tremblay are only four of the many well-known French playwrights whose plays were read, performed, published, and translated thanks to the Centre's initiative and influence. In March of 1968, the Centre hosted what was possibly the most exciting of its public readings: Michel Tremblay's Les Belles Soeurs. In light of the favourable response from the reading at the Centre, Les Belles Soeurs went on to be produced in August at le Théâtre du Rideau Vert (9). With this production Michel Tremblay's career was launched.

Michel Tremblay introduced a very different type of play to his audiences in the late 1960's. The revolutionary and enlightening spirit of Quebec in that period afforded Tremblay his opportunities. He was free to point out the ills affecting Quebec society in his own unique way. Political and social reforms of the past decade had paved the way for his arrival. With his first produced play, Les Belles Soeurs, Michel Tremblay managed to liberate common beliefs of the day as well as aesthetic principles which had been governing writers for decades. It was indeed the dawn of a new era in Quebec writing.

In August of 1968, Michel Tremblay opened his play Les Belles Soeurs at Montreal's Théâtre du Rideau Vert. After opening night, Canadian theatre would never be the same. Tremblay had taken Quebec theatre in a new direction - he broke rules, stretched boundaries, brought characters to the stage who had in the past been hidden in the kitchens of lower-class east-end Montreal. Tremblay was revolutionary in his use of language and structure, as well as his themes. He placed the Québecois blue-collar milieu on stage, exposing all of its unflattering cracks and rough edges. A heightened reality was formed in Tremblay's work through starkly naturalistic settings and characters. He gave an unconventional artistic form to unrefined instincts and urges. Content was as revolutionary as form. He penetrated ugly myths and facades, forcing audiences to look at the reality of life in lower-class Québecois families. His first plays concentrated on life on rue Fabre, a street in the lower-income east-end section of Montreal where blue-collar workers and their families live. Tremblay demanded change. His theatre was not about nice stage pictures or harmless themes. He wanted to explore the Québecois working-class life as it really existed and place it on stage for all to view.

Reaction to Les Belles Soeurs was mixed. Critics were either thrilled by it, hailing Michel Tremblay as the new Québecois hero, or they were disgusted by it, criticizing his unflattering depiction of the French-Canadian family and his corruption of the French language. Elaine Nardocchio sums up the controversy surrounding this first production:

> Never before had there been a play that so clearly and aggresively presented life on the wrong side of the tracks in Montreal. The language was called 'vulgar' by those who reacted negatively to the crude terms used in the play and 'disgraceful' by those who claimed the working-class language was suitable for the street but not the stage. Others felt that it was time someone dealt with the linguistic and social realities of the working class in Quebec. (10)

It was difficult to argue that the portraits presented on stage, however uncomplimentary, were inaccurate. Tremblay was the first dramatist to deal expressly with the Quebec working class and to write in their langauage. His plays established that this social group had a set of problems and a language worthy of official exposure and recognition.

Tremblay's unconventional use of language was a controversial part of Les Belles Soeurs. "Joual" is a lower-class French dialect. Renate Usmiani describes it:

> The term itself, 'joual', is simply a dialect version of the pronunciation of 'cheval'. Taken as a special idiom, it is defined by Lise Gauvin as 'a realistic language which does not seek to eliminate anglicisms, barbarisms, and Canadianisms.' (11)

"Joual" is the language of the Québecois working class. Prior to Les Belles Soeurs, characters had rarely spoken onstage in this realistic manner. The language, Tremblay points out in his plays, is married to the social milieu. The sound of the spoken word is very important to Tremblay. His use of "joual" complements his characters and his settings. Nardocchio writes:

> Michel Tremblay was the first Quebec dramatist not only to write consistently in working class Montreal French or 'joual' but also to deal explicitly with waht he saw as the sorry state of the Quebec working class. In addition, the overwhelming success of Les Belles Soeurs popularized proleteriat problems and langauge and made them the main focus of Quebec drama. Tremblay's vibrant use of 'joual' and his re-creation of its squalid context established a new image of the Quebecois people. (12)

His language underlines his themes and elevates the commonplace to the poetic.

In his play structure, Michel Tremblay employs alienation techniques such as a chorus and direct-address monologues. Tremblay creates a strong blend of Brechtian theatrical elements used, in a highly naturalistic setting. The multiplied effect of a chorus of five women seated in a kitchen on rue Fabre shouting at the audience, "this stupid rotten life", assaults an audience visually and aurally. The lines take on a greater impact when spoken by a chorus rather than a single character. Tremblay's hard-hitting monologues are another unconventional structural tool. In Les Belles Soeurs, the women face the audience one by one and tell their story. Stripped of the fourth wall, the raw truth of their sad lives emerges. Louise Forsyth notes:

> Each of the major characters stands alone, at more or less regularly spaced intervals throughout the play, to deliver her monologue, which only the audience is allowed to hear. Its impact further emphasized by stage lighting, the monologue throws into relief the essential and unremitting loneliness of each woman. (13)

This style of presentation is confrontational. With actors speaking directly to the audience, an audience is challenged and made uneasy. The audience is not transported away to a far-removed world in a Tremblay play. They are instead faced with an unrelenting, unflattering portrait of life in working-class Québecois society. Tremblay uses these theatrical conventions - stylized chorus and hard-hitting monologues - in realistic settings. Rather than the two styles jarring each other, they complement each other, effectively revealing the truth of life on rue Fabre. Tremblay, like Brecht, employs these techniques periodically to remind his audience that they are in fact watching actors in a play and not real people. If an audience feels they are watching real people, emotions may become too involved and issues cluttered; audience members may get too caught up emotionally in the story and may ignore the playwright's purpose. Tremblay wants to make sure his audience leaves the theatre with a clear, unclouded understanding of his message as delivered by his actors. Tremblay continued to experiment with theatrical conventions in his later plays.

Michel Tremblay's thematic content was revolutionary to the Quebec theatre. Prior to the 1960's, theatre in twentieth-century Quebec concentrated on religious themes and the classics. Les Compagnons de St. Laurent, founded by Father Emile Legault in 1937, was a major force in Quebec theatre and presented plays to Montreal audiences until 1952. Nardocchio sums up the theatre's activities of the 1930's, 1940's, and 1950's:

> At first, Les Compagnons de St-Laurent presented the religious theatre of Claudel, Chancerel, and Gheon. Then in the mid-forties they introduced the classics and contemporary works to Montreal audiences: Shakespeare, Molière, Musset, Anouilh. The only criticism one might make of Legault's theatre is that it was oriented almost exclusively toward European drama, and did little to contribute to the development of a Canadian repertoire. But then, at the time, none of the companies in Quebec did....Only a handful of local writers managed to have their work produced during the late forties and early fifties. (14)

Quebec writers of the late 1950's started to concentrate on the local people, but their focus was different than Tremblay's. On Marcel Dubé, a writer of the 1950's, Nardocchio comments:

> Playwrights such as Marcel Dubé portrayed money and materialism as an alienating consequence of the industrial age and the modernization of Quebec. Michel Tremblay's Québecois were not the dissatisfied middle class victims of Dubé's world, but rather hard-working, long-suffering working-class people who remained alienated from society......Tremblay's dramas about life for poor individuals and families of East End Montreal and by extension the underprivileged Quebecois won him official acclaim in Quebec.

> His view of the Quebec community inspired a whole generation of writers and actors in the seventies. (15)

Catherine McQuaid notes:

> Tremblay did not portray the habitant and folk characters, which, until this time, was the image perpetuated by the bonhomme and ceintures flechees of the Quebec Winter Carnival. No, Quebec and the theatrical experience in general was undergoing demystification. (16)

Tremblay's writing focuses on the day-to-day living of his characters. Their tragedy is not some important singular event that turns their life around; rather, it is the accumulated miserable existence into which they are born and in which they live until they die. The struggles are not of heroic proportions, but are found in daily living.

Tremblay's work has many common threads woven through it. Most of his characters are drawn from a lower-class background. His main areas of focus are women, male transvestites, and the family unit. His unflattering portrait of the Quebec family was first seen in Les Belles Souers (1968) and most recently seen in La Maison Suspendue 1990). He sees the family not as a nurturing, loving, warm entity, but rather as a trap. In his plays, families are repressive, negative, and uncaring; they are hellish to live with. His characters, especially in his early plays, are usually trying to escape from the claustrophobic family unit. Marie-Ange Brouillette, in Les Belles Soeurs, cries:

> I live in shit and that's where I'll be

> till the day I die. What do you thing I'm all skin and bones for? 'Cause I work like a carthorse. That's why. I'm sick of killing myself for nothing. My life is nothing. A big nothing. I haven't a cent to my name. I'm sick to death of this stupid rotten life. (17)

Tremblay says of the family unit:

> I most often write about the family because I want to put a bomb in the family cell. I hated what the family did to me and what the institution of the family did to people of my country....Society decides what the family should be. The members of the family do not decide. A family has unwritten laws to obey, rules to fulfill, and these rules are decided by outsiders. What society asked of the family in my experience was bad. (18)

The traditional values of the family are no longer capable of giving the modern-day Québecois the essential tools for survival. The plays of Tremblay point up the stifling nature of the close-knit family and traditional moral values. The family, for Tremblay, holds in its hand the dangerous seed of a vicious cycle repeating itself. Unfortunately, in his plays, the younger generation, determined not to follow in the footsteps of their elders, escape from the family into worlds that are just as confining and just as miserable as those from which they fled.

Michel Tremblay's work concentrates mainly on the lives of women, because he finds women more interesting subjects to write about than men. In an interview with James Quig, Tremblay notes:

> 'I have instant empathy with women. My

> father was a pressman who worked at nights all the time. I was raised by my mother and grandmother, two aunts, and a cousin. The house was full of women.' He says making men talk on the stage is not his job; Quebec theatre had always been a theatre of men. Women were always secondary, just props. (19)

Tremblay's vision of women is not the nurturing, sympathetic motherly role. Instead, his women are desperate characters trying to escape from the repetitious drudgery of their lives. They are emotionally empty, frustrated women who have been pushed into their existences by unrelenting social conditions. Usmiani observes: "The most general underlying theme of all his works is the universal desire of the human being to transcend his finite condition." (20) Tremblay's women want to transcend their misery and move into a life that is not as suffocating. They are desperately searching for the missing element, the unattainable secret, that will make their lives complete and give them a sense of emotional satisfaction and peace of mind. The means they use to attain this goal, as demonstrated by Tremblay in his plays, usually proves to be unsuccessful.

Religion and the Catholic church come under attack by Tremblay. He never sets out to make religion the sole focus of a play, but it is frequently intertwined with the influence of family. The traditional role of the Catholic Church in Quebec is a strong one; Nardocchio explains,

> Until the middle of the twentieth century, the treatment of religion was generally conservative with little critical content. During the 1960's, the Quiet Revolution promoted a re-evaluation of Catholicism and the role of traditional Christian values in society. The works of Marcel Dube, Francois Loranger, and Michel Tremblay, to name a few, all contain negative references to the role the church has played in Quebec's history and culture; the blind defense of law and order, ignorance and superstition, crass materialism, hypocrisy, and a general narrow-mindedness have all been attributed to the way religion and morality were taught in Catholic Quebec. (21)

Tremblay's unsympathetic view of religion asserts that the clergy and Catholicism are responsible for much of the repressed anger, frustration, and hurt hidden in the seams of the Quebec household. Through his negative portrayal of religion in such plays as Les Belles Soeurs, Forever Yours, Marie Lou, and Damnée Manon, Sacrée Sandra Tremblay attempts to break the traditional stranglehold religion has had on people's freedom.

From the beginning, Michel Tremblay set out to tear down the myths and negative forces that had been ruling the lower-class Quebecois for years. It is important to him that people say no to society-imposed rules and get out of their "maudite vie plate" (stupid, rotten life). Michel Tremblay related an incident which sums up for him the meaning of his theatrical quest:

> When Les Belles Soeurs was playing in Montreal in 1968, I received an eight page letter from a woman whose French was very poor - she wrote as she spoke, phonetically, and it took me

> three days to read it. It was so moving. She told me that while watching the play she discovered it was the first time she had really seen herself. She took pity on herself and told me she began to feel she wanted to try to become a better person, a better human being. Receiving one such letter in a lifetime makes all one's efforts worthwhile. That's the point of everything I write. (22)

He later added:

> The plays are not written for the real people who are involved in my plays, even though they are not too old to be saved. I write these plays for the generation after these people. I'm saying. 'Don't do that.' I don't know if it's important that Marie-Lou sees herself but it's important that women like Manon and Carmen in the audience see Forever Yours, Marie-Lou. (23)

From Les Belles Soeurs to Albertine in Five Times and beyond, Michel Tremblay wants to help the Quebecois women transcend the conditions and lives in which they exist. Through his writing, he portrays the ultimately unsuccessful escape routes chosen by his characters, and the consequences. In life, women have, unfortunately, made the same wrong choices. From what they see onstage and from lessons learned from life itself, the younger generation can witness these past mistakes and avoid them. Tremblay warns women not to count on men, religion, sex, alcohol, drugs, money, marriage, or delusions to expel them from their empty lives. He wants the future generations of Quebecois women to gain successful and permanent escapes out of the world into which they were born - "la maudite vie plate" - and to experience better lives than their mothers' and aunts'.

The cure, Tremblay maintains, begins with oneself. One's soul, which can provide an immense feeling of emotionally balanced self-fulfillment, contains the true answer to the question: "How do I escape this stupid, rotten life?" Outside forces do not work. Tremblay's women must learn to look to themselves, trust themselves, and depend on themselves. They must take the responsibilty for their own emotional and spiritual well-being. Albertine at seventy, in Albertine in Five Times, has come to that stage. At seventy, Albertine has stopped looking to others to blame; she has stopped grasping at escape vehicles that simply cloud over reality and provide only temporary relief. From the past she learns she is the only one on whom she can depend for her happiness in this life; inner tranquility comes from a complete acceptance of oneself. In the end, Tremblay asserts, this is what will furnish women with the basis for a successful escape.

ENDNOTES

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CHAPTER TWO

LES BELLES SOEURS

The first production of Les Belles Soeurs (1968) at Théâtre du Rideau Vert was directed by André Brassard. This marked the beginning of an important professional relationship between writer and director. Brassard would become Tremblay's director of choice, directing most of the first productions of his plays. In Les Belles Soeurs, Tremblay brought to the foreground fifteen women whose type had never been seen on the stage before, living out their daily existence on rue Fabre. The women presented in this play range in age from three teenagers to an old senile woman; a full neighbourhood portrait gallery is painted by Tremblay. The women gathered at Germaine Lauzon's house bemoan their fate and the powerlessness they have over their own lives. There is a bonding around misery, with each woman's tale slightly different than her neighbour's. John Ripley writes:

> In ninety minutes, Tremblay explodes two centuries of popular belief, ecclesiastical teaching, and literary myth about Quebecois women. Far from being the traditional guardians of religious and moral values, happy progenitors of large families, and good humoured houskeepers, they stand as malevolent misfits consumed with hatred of life and of themselves. (1)

There is no love of family or love of self in these women. There is a begrudging acceptance of the lot handed them in life. The women blame outside forces for their misery, but at the same time look to outside forces to gain an escape from this misery. The outside avenues of escape prove, in the long run, to be unsuccessful. This band of women are symbols for the real women of east-end, lower-class Montreal living out their lives in the kitchens and on the rotting back porches of suffocating rue Fabre.

The women of Les Belles Soeurs complain bitterly about the domestic drudgery that dominates their lives. These lives revolve around routines of housework, television, and demanding husbands. The women are filled with anger and a deep sense of frustration; they share a common hatred of "la maudite vie plate" (this stupid rotten life). In a choral piece from Act One, the women state:

> This stupid, rotten life! Monday! I get up to fix breakfast. Toast, coffee, bacon, eggs. I nearly go nuts just getting the others out of bed. The kids leave for school, my husband goes to work. Then I work. I work like a demon. I don't stop till noon. I wash sweaters, pants, underpants, bras. I scrub it, I wring it out. I rinse it. My hands are chapped. My back is sore. I curse like hell. At noon, the kids come home. They eat like pigs. They mess up the house. They leave. In the afternoon, I hang out the wash, the biggest pain of all. When I finish with that, I start the supper. They all come home. They're tired and ratty. We all fight. But at night we watch T.V.. Tuesday. I get up to fix the breakfast. The same goddamn thing...Then it's ironing. I work, I work, I work, I work. Wednesday...Shopping day. I walk all day long. I break my back carrying parcels this big. I come home beat and I've got to make supper. My husband bitches. The kids scream We all fight. Thursday and Friday the same thing. I work. I slave for a pack of morons...But at night we watch the television. I'm sick of this stupid, rotten life! This stupid, rotten life! This stupid rotten life....This stupid rotten life! This stupid..... (2)

From the outset, Tremblay sets the tone for his play. Through an enumeration of the household duties and by placing a strong emphasis on repetition, Tremblay creates a strong harsh image of daily life. The message is further amplified by having the speech outlining their mundane lives performed not by only one woman, but by five. The routine is relentless as is the women's forceful and direct presentation to the audience during this scene. The emotionless delivery of this speech reflects the automatic routine of the duties and the women's attitudes towards them. The cycle of "la maudite vie plate" is a vicious circle.

In the opening of the play Tremblay reveals to the audience the main problem in the lives of these women. They have, over time, become emotionally sterile; they have nothing to care about, no emotional ties. Renate Usminani notes:

> What these women suffer from is a total emotional and spiritual starvation. Tremblay makes us painfully aware of the missing dimension in the lives of his characters. 'Maudite vie plate' does not only mean daily dudgery and a less affluent lifestyle; first and foremost it means emotional and spiritual starvation. (3)

The family unit, in the "la maudite vie plate" speech, is always mentioned in a negative vein. The mother has a sore back, the children are disorderly, the husband complains, and they all fight. There is no love here, no sense of familial warmth or closeness. There are huge emotional gaps in these tired women, and neither husband, children, nor the family unit fill these gaps with love. It is from this emotionally barren world that "les belles soeurs" dream of escaping.

The women of the play take no responsibility for their escapes from rue Fabre. They do not make opportunities for themselves or provide an impetus for self-improvement. All of their hopes are tied up in luck, chance, and contests. Germaine is envied by the others because she has won a contest. In Act Two the women group together as a chorus for "an ode to bingo". These outside circumstances, contests, provide the one ray of hope in the eyes of many of these women for getting out.

Germaine Lauzon is one of les belles soeurs. She has won a million stamps which she must paste in special booklets in order to win the house of her dreams. She breezes through the catalogue, telling her sister Rose of her future acquisitions:

> Wait'll you see the stuff they got. I'm gonna get a new stove, new fridge, new kitchen set...I'm also getting a Colonial bedroom suite with full accessories...I'm telling you Rose. It's going to be one beautiful bedroom. And the living room. Wait till you hear this...I've got a big T.V. with built-in stereo, a synthetic nylon carpet, real paintings......(4)

Dreaming of how to spend her stamps is Germaine's way of escaping the repetitive drudgery of her life. She tries to compensate for the emotional poverty in her life by frantically embracing materialism. (5) Possessions cannot permanently fill an emotional void. Germaine's flight into consumerism is only a temporary release; she has only to look to Lisette de Courval.

Lisette de Courval is wealthier than the other women, but she still wants more. At the end of the play she is caught stealing Germaine's stamps, even though she possesses everything and more than the books of stamps could possibly buy. She still loves bingo for the prizes, and is excited by the prospect of winning. On her last cruise, Lisette encouraged a man's interest in her and regrets not encouraging him more. Even with her furs, trips, and exquisite home, Lisette is starting to flirt with other avenues of escape. Material possessions are not a satisfactory solution to "la maudite vie plate" as one always wants more and more. They are a short-term, superficial answer to a more deep-set problem.

Germaine never once tries to uncover personal strengths that may allow her to rise above her hellish life. Her temporary self-satisfaction comes from comparing the value of material possessions with her neighbours.

> Oh, and you know those glasses with the 'caprice' design. Well, I'm taking a set of those too. Mme. de Courval got a set last year. She paid a fortune for them, but I'm getting mine for free. She'll be mad as hell, eh? I'm going to have the same crystal platters as your sister-in-law, Aline.

> I'm not sure, but I think mine are even
> nicer. (6)

Germaine feels better about herself when she feels financially superior to her sisters, aunts, and neighbours.

The Catholic Church is an outside avenue to which Germaine looks to to improve her situation. It is somehow supposed to provide simple and immediate solutions to problems. In Act One of Les Belles Soeurs, Germaine hunts for her rosary beads:

> Gabrielle: Hey! It's almost seven o'clock! The rosary!
> Germaine: Dear God, my novena for Ste. Therese. I'll get Linda's radio. (She goes out)
> Rose: What does she want with Ste. Therese after winning all that?
> Des-Neiges: Maybe she's having a rough time with her kids?
> Germaine: (From the bedroom) Goddamn it! Where did she put that thing? (Germaine turns on the radio. We hear a voice saying the rosary. All the women get down on their knees). (7)
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> Rose: Germaine shut off the radio. I'm a nervous wreck.
> Germaine: What about my novena?
> Rose: How far have you gotten?
> Germaine: I'm only up to seven, but I promised to do nine. (8)

Religion proves fruitless in freeing Germaine and her sisters from their lives. There is no real thought or commitment on the part of "les belles soeurs" to religion. Like robots, they all drop to their knees to say the rosary. The stage directions continue: "After a few 'Hail Mary's' a great racket is heard outside. The women scream and run to the door." (9) The women quickly get up, thoughtlessly ending what appears to be a mindless routine. Germaine performs the nine novenas not for spiritual enrichment, but in the hope that it will help her to obtain an end.

If Germaine is having problems with her daughter Linda the impetus for a change in the relationship with her should come from Germaine and not from Ste. Therese. In reference to the influence of religion on the family, Nardocchio writes:

> Most of Michel Tremblay's plays contain negative references to the role of the church in Quebec society. The unhappy marriages of many of the women in Les Belles Soeurs, for instance, are a far cry from what they had been taught about this sacred institution. (10)

Usmiani notes:

> Like practically every other author of the nouveau theatre Quebecois, Tremblay reacted violently against the way in which the Church had traditionally governed every aspect of life in Quebec. (11)

Finally Tremblay himself states: "It's very strange what I feel about the Catholic religion. In a way they helped keep the French language in Quebec. But they screwed up everything else." (12) Religion, in the past, has not erased Germaine's problems, yet she continues to look at religion as a viable remedy.

For the older women of Les Belles Soeurs men represented a very easy and quick way out. Linda Lauzon, a younger women, is dangerously close to falling into this same trap. Germaine warns Linda about tying herself down to her shoemaker boyfriend Robert. Her constant nagging achieves the opposite effect, however, as Linda is forced to constantly defend Robert. Linda is close to running away from home. She tells her Aunt Pierrette:

> Ma and I are always fighting and I'm really getting sick of it. She's always bitching about nothing, you know? I'd sure like to get out of here. (13)

Louise Forsyth observes:

> The kitchen, that focal point of family life in east-end Montreal, is not a haven of harmony and tranquility. As we have seen in Les Belles Soeurs, it is most often a place filled with distrust, jealousy, and hatred, where family bonds act to destroy individuality and to deny vitality. (14)

Germaine is unconsciously pushing Linda out of the house and perhaps into the same stifling "maudite vie plate" in which the women of rue Fabre have toiled for so long. It is important for Tremblay that the "Lindas" of Quebec see this play and not make the same mistakes as the characters drawn onstage.

It is hard to escape rue Fabre even if one is to try. The women of Les Belles Soeurs are determined to keep each member of the street at the same level. No woman is any better than any other; why should one be more lucky? If each one has to live in this hell, then they all will. Keith Garebian writes:

> When Germaine's own sisters scheme to steal her stamps it is not because they are simply jealous of her sudden good fortune, but that, like Marie-Ange, they demand a system of equitable accreation. They ask why only one member of society should benefit from wealth while the majority are forced to slug through the endless drudgery. This is a society that, at least, provides the consolation of numbers for its nature is such that it pulls all to the same level. (15)

John Ripley adds:

> The social structure of the rue Fabre is founded upon a universal commitment to chronic despair. Germaine's good fortune offers her hope, and thus threatens to destabilize the neighborhood. The systematic sack of Germaine's dreams, concluded by her despairing cry 'Y me reste pus rien! Rien! Rien!' simultaneously restores her to the masochistic fellowship and vanquishes the menace of change. (16)

Germaine Lauzon's sisters and friends are determined she will not escape the miserable life of rue Fabre. They steal her stamps and books, thus tearing down her dreams. The yelling and bickering of the last scene of the play signals that all is normal on rue Fabre. Nothing has changed.

Des-Neiges Verrette, a neighbour of Germaine's, lives for the monthly visits of a travelling brush salesman. The first time she met this man she was afraid of him and did not let him in the house. The second time there was a blizzard outside and she let him in. Des-Neiges ordered a brush that he did not have, thus requiring him to visit again; soon he was visiting on a monthly basis. In her monologue, Des-Neiges talks of her monthly visitor:

> I think...I think I'm in love with him... I know it's silly. I only see him once a month, but it's so nice when we're together...The last time he came he took my hand when I blushed. I nearly went out of my mind. My insides went all funny when he put his big hand on mine. I need him so badly! I don't want him to go away! Sometimes, just sometimes, I dream about him. I dream...That we're married. I need him to come and see me. He's the first man that ever cared about me. I don't want to lose him! I don't want to go! If he goes away, I'll be alone again and I need to love someone...I need a man. (17)

Des-Neiges is clinging to a romantic fantasy that centers on this travelling salesman. Her life is ordered around his monthly visits and she pins all her hopes for happiness on him. An escape from her lonely life is dependent on someone else. She takes no responsibility for her future happiness, preferring to hand it over to a man. If she did marry this salesman, she would be married to a man who travelled for a living and spent little time at home; she would hardly be escaping loneliness. Des-Neiges should look to herself to battle her loneliness. She has only to gaze around Germaine's kitchen to see how unsuccessful men prove to be in getting women out of "la maudite vie plate". She would be wise not to tie her hopes up in a man.

Angeline Sauvé is an older woman who is bound in friendship to the highly religious Rhéauna Bibeau. The strength and influence that the Catholic church still has over people is seen in Rheauna and Angeline. Angeline admires the saintly Rhéauna, but misses the carefree fun things in life that a vow of serious religious devotion forbids. Rhéauna sets high moral religious standards for Angeline to live by. Finding Rheauna's life sterile, Angeline seeks an escape in the world of night clubs. Unbeknownst to "les belles soeurs", Angeline has been frequenting the club where Pierrette Guérin, Germaine's sister, works. When Pierrette enters at the end of Act One, Angeline's secret is uncovered. Angeline, in her monologue to the audience, reveals how much enjoyment she receives from the club:

> It's easy to judge people. It's easy to judge them, but you have to look at both sides of the coin. The people I've met in that club are my best friends. No one has ever treated me so well...Not even Rheauna. I have fun with these people. I can laugh with them. I was brought up by nuns in the parish halls who did the best they could, poor souls, but knew nothing. I was fifty-five years old when I learned to laugh. And it was only by chance. Because Pierrette took me to her club one night. But, you know, the minute I got in the door, I knew what it was to go through life without having any fun. I don't do anyone any harm and I buy myself two hours of pleasure every week... What am I going to do now? Dear God, what am I going to do?...Damn it all! Everyone deserves to get some fun out of life!....I guess the party's over....(18)

The news of Angeline's weekly visits to the club meets with a scandalized reaction from the women: "A club! The fastest road to hell! The road to hell, the road to hell! If you go there you'll lose your soul!" (19) The club provided Angeline with an innocent escape, a tiny release from her austere life. The clubs lit up a part of her that had become dormant. Unlike Germaine, Angeline was reaching down and touching an emotional aspect of herself to gain a brief flight from her solemn life. She was depending on a part of herself for her happiness: her sense of humour and ability to laugh. The club was not going to lift her out of her life permanently, but she did not look to it for that purpose. Rhéauna shames Angeline into promising that she will never return to the sinful world of the club; she lectures Angeline:

> Angeline, you're going to lose your soul. Tell me you won't go back. You must promise or I'll never speak to you again. It's up to you. It's me or the club. If you only knew how much that hurts me, my best friend sneaking off to a night club. You must never go back, Angeline, you hear? If you do, it's finished between us. Finished! You ought to be ashamed! Until you promise, not another word. (20)

Similar to their attitude towards Germaine, the other women do not like to see one of them getting slightly ahead or having a better time of it. If the clubs are deemed sinful by the church then no proper Catholic woman can go there and innocently have a good time. All must remain at the same level of misery.

Pierrette Guérin has escaped the claustrophobic world of rue Fabre, trading it in for the exciting club life of rue St. Laurent - the Main. Pierrette left her sisters when she was twenty and went straight to the Main with her boyfriend Johnny. She worked in Johnny's club, selling the place. Now, ten years later, Johnny has told her to get out. Pierrette recaps her sad past:

> When I left home, I was head over heels in love. I couldn't even see straight. Nothing existed for me but Johnny. Johnny, the bastard who made me waste ten years of my life. Here I am thirty years old and I feel like sixty. Ten years I worked his club for him. I was good looking. I brought in the customers and that was fine as long as it lasted...But now...Now I've had it. I'm fucked. I feel like jumping off a goddamn bridge. A girl who's been at it for ten years is all washed up. Finished. And how am I gonna explain that to my sisters? They'll never understand. I don't know what I'm gonna do now. I just don't know. (21)

She continues:

> He dropped me just like that! 'It's all over', he said. I don't need you anymore. You're too old and too ugly so pack your bags and beat it. That son-of-a-bitch! He didn't even leave me a nickle! Not a goddamn nickle! After all I did for him. Ten years! Ten years for nothing...What am I going to do now, eh? (22)

Pierrette unwisely looked to her "John", rather than depended on herself, to extricate herself from her rue Fabre existence. She freely gave the reins of responsibility of her life over to someone else. Ironically, she has returned to the world from which she originally fled to find some sort of security and direction.

Tremblay comments on the theme of family relationships through Pierrette's connection to her sisters. When Pierrette first enters at the end of Act One, she is told to get out. Throughout Act Two, she is shunned and openly insulted by the women. At the end of the play, however, she is the only one helping Germaine retrieve her stamps from the thieving women who stole them. After the women leave, Germaine tells her to get out and to never come back. Pierrette has come to her sisters for support and consolation. She desperately wants to tell her sisters what Johnny did to her; she needs their love, understanding, and forgiveness. Instead she is met with rude remarks, unwelcoming gestures, and snide quips. Warm and loving qualities do not exist in families from rue Fabre. "La maudite vie plate" strips people of their compassion and understanding.

Tied to Johnny is the world to which Pierrette escaped - the Main - rue St. Laurent. Indeed Pierrette left her bleak life on rue Fabre for another, supposedly more exciting, life. The Main, unfortunately, does not prove to be the promised land. Pierrette has escaped one trap and landed dead centre in another. Usmiani observes of the Main:

> This is a world of false glitter and real pathos; a world of no exit where the only escape possible comes through illusion; where illusion is quickly shattered. For the women who are caught in the emotional and physical trap of frustration that the family constitutes within the limitations

> of an inbred neighbourhood, the Main stands for glamour, freedom, life itself. However, seen within its own context, the world of the Main turns out to be ultimately as inbred, frustrating, and limiting in its own kinky way, as the petty household world around 'la rue Fabre'. All the glory of the Main is but illusion, its inhabitants are forced to realize, as the author uncovers layer after layer of self-deception....Moving to the Main, we find that characters achieve a somewhat higher level of awareness: they have, after all, broken out of the original prison family life. Yet in moments of lucidity they realize the tawdriness of their existence; they, too, are filled with a dimly understood need to escape into another world. (23)

Judith Rudakoff adds:

> What women in the plays of Tremblay do not see is that, in escaping from their problems. they are often trading one set of restrictions and routines for another set that is perhaps less structured or less familiar to them. (24)

Ten years after her original escape from rue Fabre Pierrette is planning another escape, this time from the tawdry world of the Main.

Rejected by Johnny, Pierrette returns home. Her disapproving sisters stand as a jury, judging Pierrette's attempt for a better life; they banish her from their family homes. Sadly, Pierrette turns to alcohol:

> All I've got left is the bottle. And
> that's what I've been doing since Friday...
> Yeah I guess there's nothing left but booze...
> Good thing I like that. (25)

Pierrette's dreams of escape and glory through Johnny have crumbled. She has chosen another escape route, alcohol, which will in time prove just as unsuccessful and dead end as her previous choices. Alcohol as a coping device is not a wise choice. It pushes one further and further into a black pit of self-pity. Tremblay focuses on the ensuing problems of alcohol in much greater detail in the character of Leopold in Forever Yours, Marie-Lou (1971).

Lise Paquette, a young friend of Linda's, finds herself pregnant and unmarried. Lise is determined this pregnancy will not ruin her life. Following Pierrette's advice, she opts for the only way out - an abortion. Lise, like many of her elders, was trapped by the sweet charms of a man. A man represented to her a quick lifeline out; this option has failed her. Lise recalls, of the father of her child:

> I don't even know where he is. He just took off somewhere. Sure he promised me a lot. We were gonna be happy. He was making all this money. I thought everything was roses. Presents here, presents there. No end to it. It was really nice for a while... But shit, I knew this would happen. I just knew it. (26)

Lise continues:

> Why do I always wind up in the shit when all I want to do is get out of it? Christ, I'm sick of working at Kresge's. I want to make something of my life. I want to get somewhere. (27)

Lise admires Pierrette, for she believes her to be making lots of money and to be with the man she loves. The opposite, of course, is the truth. If a man cannot provide Lise with her ticket out she will search for other avenues.

Like Germaine, Lise mistakenly equates materialism with emotional contentment. She tells Linda:

> I want a car, a decent place to live, some nice clothes...I came in the back door, but goddamn it, I'm going to go out the front! And nothing's gonna get in my way, you hear. Nothing's gonna stop me! In two or three years you're gonna see that Lise Paquette is a somebody! And money, she's gonna have it, okay? (28)

Lise is looking for a fast way out. She views money as the instant answer to all ills. Regretably, this is not true. Lise does not embody an optimistic future for the younger women of rue Fabre. She looks to the same means as those before her to break free. Through Lise, Tremblay illustrates the continuation of this bleak cycle.

Rose Ouimet, Germaine's sister, has one of the most painful existences in Les Belles Soeurs. In Act One she is brimming with cynical remarks and outlandish stories. Her friends say of her: "Isn't she a riot! There's no holding her back." "Yeah, it's always fun to go to a party with Rose." (29) Rose replies:

> When it's time to laugh, you might as well have a good one. That's what I say. Every story has a funny side, you know. Even the sad ones....(30)

Rose uses her humour to help cover up for herself and the others the ugly situtation in which she is forced to live.

Rose lives with a man whom she despises and is saddled with a family towards which she harbors no loving feelings.

She feels trapped in this marriage to a man who persistently demands his sexual rights. There is no love or affection in the sexual act, it is strictly for the physical gratification of her husband. In her eyes, it verges on rape. Taught by the Catholic church that birth control is wrong, Rose finds herself, at forty-four, pregnant again. Forced to live in this hellish condition, Rose views her life as a one-way spiral down. In her solo, at the end of Act Two, she cries out:

> When I wake up in the morning, he's lying there staring at me...Waiting. Every night, I get into bed and there he is, waiting!.... Goddamn sex! It's never that way in the movies is it? Oh no, in the movies it's always fun! Besides, who cares about a woman who's gotta spend her life with a pig just 'cause she said yes to him once? Well I'm telling you, no fucking movie was ever this sad. Because a movie don't last a lifetime. Why did I ever do it? I should have said no. I should have yelled it at the top of my lungs and been an old maid instead. I was so ignorant in those days. Christ, I didn't know what I was in for. All I could think of was 'the Holy State of Matrimony". You gotta be stupid to bring up your kids like that, knowing nothing. My Carmen won't get caught like that. Because me, I've been telling her for years what men are really worth. She won't end up like me, forty-four years old, with a two year old kid and another one on the way, with a stupid slob of a husband who can't understand a thing, who demands his 'rights' at least twice a day, three hundred and sixty-five days of the year. When you get to be forty and you realize you've nothing behind you and nothing infront of you, it makes you want to dump the whole thing and start all over. But a woman can't do that....A woman gets grabbed by the throat and she's gotta stay that way right to the end. (31)

Rose is helpless in her situation and is too weak to escape it. Usmiani writes:

> The central problem is sex: the ignorance, religious taboos, and personal inhibitions which make a healthy sexuality impossible, leading instead to bitterness, frustration, and either hatred or total indifference between the partners. (32)

Forsyth adds:

> Frank response on the part of the character to her own sexual desire has great significance in these plays. Suppression of such desire is an unambiguous sign of alienation and will be accompanied by a set of traits. The character will be passive, fearful, dominated by moral taboos....The character who thus listens only to the voice of duty and denies her sexuality destroys her personal energy to such a serious extent that she must helplessly submit to the power and authority others impose on her. (33)

"The Holy State of Matrimony" has become a prison for Rose, but she does nothing to rescue herself from her situation. The one place she has to go is her tiny balcony: "Me, I get the hell out! I go sit on the balcony." (34) She jumps at any invitation to attend a neighbourhood gathering to get out of her house. Sadly, she has resigned herself to the fact that she will remain trapped in this miserable life. Her one tiny release is her sense of humour. She can make others laugh and this gives her some pleasure; she feels looked up to.

In his plays Michel Tremblay uses theatrical staging devices to heighten thematic elements and isolate important points. In Les Belles Soeurs he uses a chorus of five women, as previously discussed, for the "la maudite vie plate" recitation in Act One and the "ode to bingo" in Act Two. The intensity of the voices and the forceful manner of delivery has a strong impact on the audience. They are confronted visually with these women as well as aurally. Tremblay effectively uses smaller groups of women, in pairs and in trios, to heighten certain elements and areas in the play. When Pierrette walks in at the top of Act Two, Rose, Germaine, and Garbrielle act as a type of jury, a family tribunal, standing in judgement of their sister's past. They show their disdain for Pierrette's world of night clubs by barking in unison:

> Shut up you devil. Shut up! A club!
> The fastest road to hell! Women of sin
> like you, Pierrette! Shut up, Pierrette.
> The devil has your tongue...How many times
> have we been told...It's a mortal sin
> to set foot in a club. (35)

The image of a jury is pointed up physically by having the three women stand together. To counter their remarks Tremblay has the younger generation, Lise, Ginette, and Linda, take an opposite stand while praising the world of the clubs:

> The devil? Come on! Get with the times!
> The clubs are not the end of the world!
> They're no worse than any place else.
> They're fun! They're lots of fun. The
> clubs are lots of fun. (36)

They too stand as a group, creating a strength in voice and appearance to combat their elders. A virtual debate occurs onstage with one group of three unified voices challenging another group of three unified voices. The subject matter they are debating, the clubs, is present on the stage in the embodiment of Pierrette. In Pierrette, Tremblay has provided his audience with a visual key into the world of the clubs, more broadly - the Main. Besides being a visual key, Pierrette is also emotionally tied to both worlds - her past is with her sisters and her present is linked to a night club. Tremblay visually enhances this dual aspect of Pierrette by putting her right in the middle of the argument. A part of her comes from the same world of her sisters, another part from the world described by Lise, Ginette, and Linda. Wanting the comfort and understanding of her sisters and coming from the world of the Main, Pierrette's conflict is emphasized through the staging.

While the debate surrounding the clubs is taking place, Tremblay isolates, through lighting, Angeline and Rhéauna. The conflict centers on these two women with both representing opposing sides. The older women act as a chorus supporting Rhéauna from the side shadows. Their disdainful air and harsh criticism of the clubs gives Rhéauna's argument a heightened and holy tone. The young women support Angeline and fight back saying the clubs are fine. The outcome of the debate on the clubs has the most significance for these two women as it has a definite bearing on the future of their friendship. This crucial moment in their friendship is given focus through staging and isolated lighting. With the two sides of the issue being presented, Angeline is forced to take one side. She reluctantly goes to the side of Germaine and the other older women. The choruses have a strong influence on the action that is occuring in the light between Rheauna and Angeline.

In Act One, Gabrielle, prompted by the radio, reminds the women, "Hey! It's almost seven o'clock! The rosary." (37) The women get down on their knees without any thought and utter a few "Hail Marys". Tremblay, in this instance, creates a complementary visual image of a group of women mindlessly dropping to their knees. There is no real connection or understanding of what they are doing and the physicalization of the "Hail Marys" helps to point that up. It is simply a tedious routine that must be followed. Vocally, the women flatly utter their "Hail Marys" without much conviction, thus emphasizing the monotony of the routine and the conformity of the women.

The direct-address monologues performed by the characters provide the audience with a rare insider's view of what is really going on in the heads and hearts of these women. The audience is privy to very personal thoughts and feelings which no one else in Germaine's kitchen has ever heard. The characters address the audience with great simplicity and candour. They feel they cannot tell their stories to the other women, so when a character is disclosing, Tremblay places the remaining women in the background. This confidence or trust bestowed in the audience by a character is underlined through the staging of the play. When a character addresses the audience the rest of the stage goes to black; there is one light on the character speaking. They feel safe enough in this dark world to divulge private feelings and inner thoughts - something they will not do when the lights are up and all onstage can hear. There is a trusting bond and strong rapport created between stage and audience with the character throwing out a part of herself and having the audience receive it sympathetically.

Through this physicalization and staging, Tremblay makes the audience feel that they are privy to very personal thoughts and raw feelings. Because of this trust and added knowledge, they have a real connection and stake in the character. They, therefore, listen with much more intensity and alertness. With the information that is being revealed they will understand much more this character's motives and reactions when they go back to the larger action of the kitchen; this private knowledge, in turn, will certainly affect an audience's overall reaction to, and understanding of, the play.

The staging of the direct address monologues serves another symbolic function for Tremblay. When a woman steps forward into a light, with the rest of the stage falling to black, she is isolated from the rest of the characters. This separation into distinct areas on the stage underlines the themes of isolation and entrapment Tremblay has explored in the play. Des-Neiges is lonely without a man; Lise feels she is alone and has no one to count on; Rose is all alone trapped in her miserable home; and Pierrette is alone after being dumped by Johnny. In their moment of truth they are emotionally alone, physically islolated in a pool of light. The emotional barriers that exist between the women are heightened visually through the fragmented lighting of the stage areas. With the other women onstage, Tremblay makes an added statement. Their unspoken presence, lurking in the back shadows, provides a comment on the action of the play. Even though these women spend a lot of time together, they do not get too close, too involved in each other's lives. They are not interested in truly helping one another. They turn a deaf ear to the painful reality of their neighbours' situations. They are there and see it as silent observers, but remain distanced and removed. In terms of staging their presence in the dark background reinforces this point. When a woman has her moment of truth, revealed through her monologue, Tremblay keeps the other women onstage. They are within earshot, but they, as characters, have no reaction to the monologue. They may hear Rose's cry for help, but they do nothing about it; or else they do not even hear it because they are too wrapped up in their own "maudite vie plate". This staging amplifies the feelings of isolation which these women suffer. There are people physically close by, on the stage and on rue Fabre, but no one cares to help.

In Act Two, Tremblay uses a type of split focus to allow one character's speech to undercut a second character's. Lise envies Pierrette and the life she has made for herself. She turns to Pierrette in her time of need and Pierrette suggests an abortion and even a suitable doctor. While Pierrette is revealing to the audience the truth of her relationship with Johnny and how he simply dropped her, how she is broke and drinking heavily, Lise states:

> Ah, why do these things always happen to me? Pierrette, she's lucky. Working in the same club for ten years. Making lots of money... And she's in love too! I wouldn't mind being in her shoes. Even if her family can't stand her at least she's happy on her own. (38)

After Lise's speech, Pierrette adds:

> He dropped me, just like that!...That son-of-a-bitch didn't leave me a nickle. Not a goddamn nickle! After all I did for him. Ten years! Ten years for nothing. What am I going to do, eh? I just don't know. It's hell pretending everything's great. But I can't tell Linda and Lise I'm finished. (39)

Tremblay juxtaposes Pierrette's speech with Lise's: the reality of the situation versus the romanticized image. Lise looks up to Pierrette and the attractive image she projects. In providing the real picture, Tremblay has

Pierrette's candid revelation of her life interspersed with Lise's adulation of her. Lise's comments make Pierrette's speech much more poignant and sad. Pierrette's speech serves to contrast and undercut what Lise is saying about the glamorous life of the clubs, and her physical presence serves as a warning and provides the true picture of the alternative lifestyle of rue St. Laurent - the Main.

Through staging and dramaturgy, Tremblay underlines the similarity in emotional makeup found in both Pierrette and Lise. Interspersed throughout Pierrette's final speech of despair is Lise's line: "I'm scared! Dear God, I'm scared." (40) Lise is frightened of what the future holds - the birth of a child, an abortion, how will she get out of this troubled situation. Her line, however, serves as a direct commentary on Pierrette's lines and more deeply on Pierrette's present existence. Pierrette too is frightened of what the future holds. "I'm scared! Dear God, I'm scared" is the small insecure voice rumbling inside of Pierrette, but externalized and given volume through Lise.

After Les Belles Soeurs was produced, Michel Tremblay went on to write En Pieces Detachées, Forever Yours, Marie-Lou, and Hosanna. By the early 1970's his place in Canadian theatre history had solidified. With each play, Tremblay kept pushing forward and breaking new ground. In 1973 Les Belles Soeurs was produced in English at the St. Lawrence Centre in Toronto, under the direction of André Brassard. Tremblay's work was universal enough that audiences outside of Quebec understood it and found merit in its themes and ideas. In 1990, at the International duMaurier Theatre Festival at the Harbourfront, a group of women from Glasgow presented *Les Belles Soeurs*. Twenty-two years after its original production, this play piqued the interest of a group far removed from the world of "la rue Fabre". It is a tribute to the universality of Tremblay's vision that audiences still understand the message of the play and find it relevant to present-day life.

ENDNOTES

[1] John Ripley, "From Alienation to Transcendence. The Quest for Selfhood in Michel Tremblay's Plays," Canadian Literature 85 (1980), p. 47.

[2] Michel Tremblay, Les Belles Soeurs, trans. John Van Burek and Bill Glassco (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1974) pp. 15-16.

[3] Renate Usmiani, Michel Tremblay (Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 1982), pp. 23-24.

[4] Tremblay, op. cit., p. 12.

[5] Alan Twigg, For Openers: Conversations with Twenty-Four Canadian Writers (Harbour: Madiera Park, 1981), p. 151.

[6] Tremblay, op. cit., p. 12.

[7] Ibid., pp. 23-24.

[8] Ibid., p. 25.

[9] Ibid., p. 24.

[10] Elaine Nardocchio, "Church and State, Religion and Politics in Quebec Theatre," Bulletin of Canadian Studies 8. 2. (1983/84), p. 76.

[11] Renate Usmiani, "Hyperrealism: Michel Tremblay and Franz Xaver Kroetz," Canadian Drama/L'Art Dramatique Canadien 13. 2 (1987), p. 205.

[12] Alan Twigg, For Openers: Conversations with Twenty-Four Canadian Writers (Harbour: Madiera Park, 1981), p. 153.

[13] Tremblay, op. cit., p. 84.

[14] Louise Forsyth, "First Person Feminine Singular: Monologues by Women in Several Modern Quebec Plays," *Canadian Drama/L'Art Dramatique Canadien* 5. 2. (1979), p. 195.

[15] Keith Garebian, "Liberation in the Rag-And-Bone-Shop," *Canadian Literature* 66 (1975), pp. 114-115.

[16] Ripley, op. cit., p. 47.

[17] Tremblay, op. cit., pp. 48-49.

[18] *Ibid*., pp. 81-82.

[19] *Ibid*., p. 77.

[20] *Ibid*., pp. 79-80.

[21] *Ibid*., pp. 95-96.

[22] *Ibid*., p, 96.

[23] Usmiani, *Michel Tremblay*, op. cit., pp. 18, 9, 24.

[24] Judith Rudakoff. *The Women in Forever Yours, Marie Lou* (Edmonton: University of Alberta, 1977), p. 30.

[25] Tremblay, op. cit., pp. 96-97.

[26] *Ibid*., p. 91.

[27] *Ibid*., p. 91.

[28] *Ibid.*, p. 91.

[29] *Ibid.*, p. 33.

[30] *Ibid.*, p. 33.

[31] *Ibid.*, pp 104-105.

[32] Renate Usmiani, "The Tremblay Opus. Unity in Diversity," *Canadian Theatre Review* 24 (1979), p. 19.

[33] Forsyth, op. cit., p. 193.

[34] Tremblay, op. cit., p. 32.

[35] *Ibid.*, pp. 77-79.

[36] *Ibid.*, p. 78.

[37] *Ibid.*, p. 23.

[38] *Ibid.*, p. 96.

[39] *Ibid.*, pp. 96-97.

[40] *Ibid.*, pp. 97.

CHAPTER THREE

BONJOUR, LA, BONJOUR

Bonjour, là, Bonjour was first produced by the Compagnie des Deux Chaises at the National Arts Centre in Ottawa in August 1974. The play continued Tremblay's exploration of "la maudite vie plate" and entrapment on rue Fabre. In Bonjour, là, Bonjour a young man, having just returned home from a trip to Europe, is confronted with discontented family members demanding that he somehow supply a remedy to their unhappy lives. In the play Tremblay divides his focus into three areas: the main character of the play, Serge, and his relationship with his father; and his separate relationships with each of his older sisters, Lucienne, Denise, and Monique, and two aunts, Albertine and Charlotte. The third relationship focuses on Serge's incestuous affair with his sister, Nicole. As the centre of the play Serge is a sounding board for each of the women. With the exception of Nicole, they all look to Serge in two ways: first, as the ultimate solution to their unhappy lives; and second, as a key component in their escape route out. Renate Usmiani remarks of these women:

> As a combination child/lover figure, as well as sex symbol, Serge is overwhelmed by their demands on him, which range from insignificant but irritating admonishments to all-encompassing claims on his life. More dangerously, each one attempts to use Serge for their own purposes. (1)

The escape paths chosen by the women of Bonjour, là, Bonjour have, over time, proven unsuccessful. In order to live his life free of constraint, Serge must escape from under the control of these manipulative women. He must stop being a lifeline for them out of their miserable existences.

Lucienne is the oldest of the family. When their mother died, she took on many of the motherly responsibilities. From a young age, she possessed a strong drive to extricate herself from the stifling world of rue Fabre and "la maudite vie plate". Lucienne had her eyes set on higher goals and nothing was going to stop her from attaining them. She tells Serge:

> It's true, I've got everything I ever dreamed of. I told myself I wasn't going to end up like Mama, with nothing. I made sure that wouldn't happen to me. I wasn't going to marry some French-Canadian turd who'd give me kids with complexes. Oh no, I was aiming higher than that. I wanted to be on the right side of the tracks, the money side, and that's where I am, dammit. (2)

For Lucienne, "the right side of the tracks" translated into marrying an English doctor and living in a wealthy Anglophone suburb. Lucienne continues:

> I got what I wanted I got my Anglais. I made up my mind I was going to marry him and I did. When we went out together I paid because I was earning the money. But I didn't care because I knew that someday he'd pay it all back, that he'd pay me back even more than that. Because I knew that someday he'd be making big money! Well, my God, big money isn't the word for it. (3)

Lucienne escaped rue Fabre through marriage. From the outside her life appears perfect. She has wealth and status - everything for which she had worked so hard. As time progresses, however, Lucienne's escape through marriage has not given her the strong sense of well-being and emotional satisfaction she had originally thought it would.

Lucienne felt that if she escaped into an English world through marriage, her life would be set. Anglophones, at the time of Bonjour, là, Bonjour (1974), still held top positions in the wealthy social circles. In their description of Lucienne, translators John Van Burek and Bill Glassco remark:

> The actress should bear in mind that in the original, Lucienne speaks French with a slight English accent as though she has lost the habit of speaking her mother tongue. (4)

Lucienne's abandonment of rue Fabre is made clear through her language. Just as it is important for "joual" to be brought to the stage to distinctly define the women of rue Fabre, so it is equally important for Tremblay to have Lucienne's French tinged with an English accent to clearly mark her present existence, and demarcate, aurally, the difference between her and her family. Lucienne has tossed away her past in order to achieve what she feels is something better. The Anglophone world was one of nice houses and well-spoken people; it was what Lucienne longed to be part of when she was young. Unfortunately the Anglo world, in the long run, like her marriage, has failed to give her the contentment for which she is still searching.

There is an emotional gap that exists in Lucienne that she is constantly trying to fill. She is never really settled in her present condition. Before she was married she longed to be rich and away from life on "la rue Fabre". Although she married an English doctor, thus satisfying her desire for wealth and status, she soon became tired of the lifestyle of a doctor's wife. In her home, she keeps buying things. Like Germaine Lauzon of Les Belles Soeurs, Lucienne looks for emotional satisfaction in the acquisition of material possessions. When she buys things, she temporarily feels better. This occupies her time, but blinds her to the real problem. She says of her hollow existence:

> I'm not even forty-five and already my life works just like a clock. Well, I've got...what, twenty-five, thirty years left to live? And already I know everything that's going to happen to me. (5)

Of her empty marriage she says:

> You know things aren't too hot between Bob and me. We've been married for twenty years. Well, we all know about Bonjour, bonjour. Bonsoir, bonsoir. That's about it. Small talk, you know what I mean. (6)

She continues her lament:

> It gets to the point there's nothing left to do. You sit there day in and day out while your life goes on by itself without you and you don't know what to do. To

> pass the time you go out and buy things,
> then you stick them in the basement
> because they're too big. (7)

Lucienne buys more and more in an endless attempt to fill this emotional gap. Objects and money do not supply Lucienne with a successful escape from her empty marriage and colourless upper class life; they are not substitutes for emotional satisfaction. Lucienne keeps escaping into new worlds and situations thinking she will find happiness there. Answers, for Lucienne, always exist outside of her. She places the responsibility for her emotional well-being into the hands of others. When feelings of discontent occur, she looks around and grabs at anything, hoping it will stifle the rumblings. Life is not a series of stations and Lucienne must stop looking at it like it is. All her life she has thought - "When I marry rich", "When I leave rue Fabre", "When my home is beautifully furnished". All these stations have fallen short in providing her with some inner satisfaction. The worm of "la maudite vie plate" exists in Lucienne, and until she looks inwards instead of outwards to supply herself with some sort of emotional contentment, her attempted escapes will keep proving fruitless.

Unhappy in marriage, and with a house full of expensive furnishings, Lucienne looks to a third option to provide her with an escape: a young lover. Lucienne's new remedy is drawn from outside of the world and home she once fought so hard for to obtain. Lucienne feels that an affair with Serge's friend Robert will fulfill her life. Never once in the play does she say she loves or cares for Robert. Never once does she say Robert is filling an emotional need inside of her; she barely mentions him. All she worries about, in regard to Robert, is when and how she is going to meet him. The thrill of the affair, or the secrecy of it, is more important to her than her actual lover; the challenge keeps her occupied. Serge warns Lucienne:

> Oh for Chrissake, open your eyes, that's Robert's speciality shacking up with women who could pass for his mother. Whatever happens, don't take him seriously. Have your fun and when it's over, forget him. Just don't make a Greek tragedy out of it. (8)

Serge points out to Lucienne that she suffers from boredom. Robert is not the answer; he is simply a short-term escape away from a long-term problem. This affair is yet another failed attempt to feed Lucienne's emotionally starved appetite. She is again seeking emotional satisfaction in an outside force.

Linked to her affair with Robert is Lucienne's attempt to coerce Serge into being an accomplice to her escape. She proposes to Serge that she rent an apartment for him to live in. Lucienne, of course, benefits from this arrangement too.

> Now, if I were to get you an apartment

> somewhere, like near Carre St. Louis, for instance. I've seen some nice ones there. If I were to rent one for you, you'd have a nice quiet place to live... and every now and then you could let us use it, me and Robert. (9)

When Serge laughs at Lucienne's proposal she defends her affair calling it normal in comparison to Serge's and Nicole's, which she calls sick. Lucienne does not directly look to Serge as an escape route; rather, she uses him indirectly as an accomplice in her already-planned flight.

Denise, Serge's second sister, is a married woman who runs a small store with her husband, Gaston. She is outwardly a very funny woman, always armed with a quick wit.

She is good-natured and takes great delight in tormenting Serge through teasing and tickling. As the play progresses, however, humour is discovered to be a guard erected by Denise to shield herself from a deep-rooted personal pain and low self-esteem, and as a defense to get herself through the rough times. Denise's marriage, like Lucienne's, has gone sour. The emotional satisfaction Denise originally found in her marriage has vanished. When Serge asks her where her husband is, she tells him, "His bowling, dear, have you forgotten his bowling? My life still depends on his gutter balls, no kidding. It's been that way for fifteen years." (10) Denise, like Lucienne, is searching for ways to escape from her present condition;

she too looks to outside forces for a quick remedy.

To fill the void in herself, Denise turns to food. She tells Serge:

> For the past few months I've been eating twice what I used to...And please, no cracks about my weight, I know I've gotten fatter. In the time you were gone, little brother, your sister Denise went from large to extra large. (11)

Denise has settled on food as a substitute for her stunted emotional life. When Serge first visits her upon his arrival home, she talks about food: "Well, well, well, what a surprise! Come on in! Guess what, I've got a roast beef in the oven. How's that grab you?" (12) and, "Come on little brother let's eat. It's awful you know, I'm getting to be such a pig. Every year it gets worse." (13) The more obese Denise becomes, the unhappier she becomes. To suppress these feelings, she eats more and more and the vicious cycle continues. At one point, in the middle of the play, Denise, on the verge of tears, cries out: "Please everyone, just get off my back and let me enjoy my food. That's all I've got left." (14) Denise is substituting something physical - food - to solve an emotional problem. In the long run, food does not successfully wipe away her emotional pain.

The inner pain from which Denise is trying to escape is revealed in her monologue in the latter part of the play:

> Gaston doesn't want me at the cash anymore because he thinks I'm too fat! He's ashamed of me...Oh, he hasn't said so himself, but I can tell, I'm not blind. You know me, I like to joke with the customers, eh? I like to laugh...and...okay, so I always talk about my weight, but what do you expect? I'd rather laugh at myself in front of people than have them laugh behind my back. But Gaston doesn't like it anymore. He gets in a huff the minute I crack a joke... Before, when I'd clown around, he'd be the first to laugh. And he married me 'cause he liked plump women, for God's sake, so what's come over him all of a sudden? Maybe I go too far with the jokes, maybe that's it. (Trying to laugh). I don't know, I think it's funny telling dirty jokes to all those prudes and old ladies. Gaston must be afraid of losing customers...No...No, it's not that. He's ashamed of me, I know it. He's ashamed of me 'cause I'm too fat! (15)

At the beginning Denise's marriage was a happy one. She says of those early years:

> You know, we've had the store for five years now...We worked hard to get that place, Gaston and I...And we were happy too...(16)

Memories of a happy past, when life was good, haunt Denise. It is from this painful reality that she is trying to escape.

Denise, like Rose Ouimet of Les Belles Soeurs, uses humour to get herself through. She grasps at humour to save herself, to escape the humiliation of having people laugh at her. Behind her jokes and happy exterior lies a very poignant sadness. She tells Serge: "But now when I try to be funny, you're the only one who laughs." (17) Her husband no longer laughs at her jokes; he avoids her by going bowling. Humour, once a way of getting by for Denise, now fails to provide her with the release it originally did.

Like her sister Lucienne, Denise has been anxiously waiting for Serge's return. Discontented in her present condition, Denise looks to him as a saviour to make everything better. She suggests to Serge that he move in with her and Gaston:

> Hey, little brother, you know what you should do, you should come and live with us. Look at you. You're as skinny as a rail...You could have the front parlour, we never use it. There's loads of room. You wouldn't have to worry about us, you could come and go as you please. And me....I'd spoil you rotten...(18)

Later, Denise adds: "If you take the front room like I offered, maybe I'd stick to a diet, a real one." (19) She puts the responsibility for her future into Serge's hands. In Denise's eyes her self-esteem will improve and problems vanish if her brother moves in with her and her family. She looks to Serge to provide her with a solution - a direct line out of her present condition.

Denise has sexual fantasies about Serge. Throughout the play she engages in sexual inneundo and much flirtation towards her brother. She says to him, at various points in the play,

> Holy cow, little brother, are you good looking...Come on sexy, don't stand there in the door. Come in and sit down. You're giving me hot flashes! (20)

> If I don't control myself, I'm going to rape you on the spot. (21)
>
> Why don't you take a shower, sexy? You can walk around in your underpants, I'll lose weight just looking at you. (22)

Usmiani observes:

> In the next generation, we are presented with Gabriel's three older daughters, all of whom play mother to their younger brother, Serge, who thus becomes the target of a threefold sexual frustration, which is in no way relieved by the fact that each one of these younger women is, after all, in official possession of a husband. (23)

Not receiving any emotional support, affection, or sexual gratification from Gaston, Denise is forced to look elsewhere and she targets Serge. Relieving her sexual frustration by using Serge will not provide Denise with a long-term escape plan. Sleeping with Serge will simply make her more paranoid. She already wonders why her husband is not as attentive as he used to be and what people say about her weight behind her back. Serge would have to be constantly around. Denise must first work on herself to improve her emotional well-being and to acquire some self-esteem and emotional stability; she must stop looking to others to furnish her with an escape.

Monique, Serge's third sister, has been left at home to look after an undefined number of children and her mother-in-law. Her husband, Guy, is a salesman who does a lot of travelling. Monique says of her marriage:

> I'm talking about Guy, I said I never

> see him anymore...and I'm fed up. If all
> he wanted kids for was to dump them in
> my lap and then beat it, well frankly, he
> needn't have bothered...Oh sure he was
> always around when it was time to have
> kids. But where is he now? Conventions,
> meetings, God only knows, but he's
> never at home. Never. And on top
> of that, he's stuck me with his mother.
> Well, if that's all my life is, I'd just
> as soon pull out now. No, I'm sure
> there's someone else...A woman...or women... (24)

Monique adds:

> I know I'm depressing, but do you think I
> like that? Do you thing I like being the
> way I am? Look at me I'm a nervous wreck.
> If I had a husband who'd look after me I'd
> be alright, but no, I had to go and
> marry a Jack-in-the-box! (25)

Monique's marriage has ceased to provide her with any emotional comfort. (Des-Neiges Verrette should take note of what marriage to a travelling salesman can be like.) Monique wants to be taken care of. Through marriage she willingly placed the responsibility for her life into the hands of a man. He was to look after her and provide her with emotional security. She, therefore, places the blame for her present existence on her husband.

Monique finds temporary consolation from her empty life in a bottle of tranquilizers. The pills provide Monique with a false method of coping with life. Going through day-to-day motions in a half-daze numbs the pain and suppresses the emptiness that exists in her life. She cries to Serge:

> Five years, five years I've been taking

> pills on account of my nerves. And for what?....Look, it's the doctor, our own brother-in-law, who prescribes these pills. What can I do? I have to take take them. (26)

Pills have failed to give Monique the support she desperately needs. At one time they may have helped, but now they simply amplify the problem. They have made Monique nervous and paranoid. She tells Serge:

> They watch me all the time. Sometimes in the morning, when I'm not feeling well, you should see the look on their faces. They're just waiting for me to crack. (27)

Tranquilizers have proven over time to be highly addictive. Having chosen this dead-end path of pills, Monique is worse off now than before she started taking them. An addiction problem, from which she must now free herself, is added on top of the original problem which she was trying to escape - a lonely existence.

Suicide, through an overdose of pills, presents an alternative to Monique. She warns Serge:

> If things keep going the way they are, I'll take the whole bottle, and then... so long everybody. (28)

Suicide is indeed present, lurking in the back of her mind as a permanent escape plan.

Monique, like Lucienne and Denise, looks to Serge to make her life better. During his visit, she tells him:

> I was really anxious for you to get back. I thought you might bring me a little, I I don't know, a little comfort. (29)

She continues, later in the play:

> Hey, did I fall asleep? I must have... You must help me to relax 'cause I feel wonderful...I think I even had a dream. I haven't had a dream for months. Hey, don't go away. You're good for my nerves. (30)

Serge is the one in Monique's eyes providing her with some comfort and relief. She helplessly sits in her condition waiting for him to release her. His company is simply prolonging her problem. As long as he keeps holding her hand she will continue to avoid her real troubles. Monique looks to men to take care of her; she once asked this of her husband and now she is asking it of Serge.

Like her sister, Denise, Monique expresses an overt sexual interest in Serge. Her marriage to Guy has ceased to produce any emotional or sexual satisfaction for her; she thus turns to the man whom she trusts the most to fill these needs - Serge. Monique attempts to lure Serge into her arms:

> Maybe I'd feel better if I lay down for a bit...Come on, let's go into the bedroom...When you're here, it doesn't seem so bad...I think I even breathe better...It's so warm in here...Why don't you take off your shirt?...You can take your shirt off...I just want to look at you...Didn't you ever notice how I'd look at you when we'd go swimming in the summer with the kids? And you're a lot more exciting to look at than my bag-of-bones husband. (31)

Having sexual relations with her brother will not aid Monique in finding an inner tranquility or a heightened sense of self-esteem. She is already too dependent on too many things. What Monique needs is to break away and be independent. She needs to take care of herself instead of placing that responsibilty on someone else.

Monique, in her hazy drug-induced state, looks to Serge and Nicole, their sister, as her saviours. She fantasizes about running away and escaping to their home. She tells Serge about this fantasy and how she tried turning it into reality:

> I'd come knocking on your door and ask you to take me in, you and Nicole...I almost did when you were away...In fact, I did do it...I got right up in the middle of Carol Burnett and I went to see Nicole. She'll tell you all about it when you see her...I spent the night at your place and then in the morning I came home. Or, to be more precise, I got kicked out. Oh, Nicole was very polite about it, you know how she is...She tried to convince me that my duty was here, but I know she didn't believe a word of it...I guess she just didn't know how to get rid of me. (32)

Moving in with Serge and Nicole, she feels, will make her problems disappear. In reality she would be placing the control and direction of her life in the hands of Serge and Nicole. Again her pattern of dependency is repeated. Monique's problems are not so easily solved. Moving in with her siblings is simply a superficial answer to a more deep-set problem.

Serge's aunts, Albertine and Charlotte, place an added strain on Serge as they too look to him to improve their lives. Albertine plays the martyr who lets no one forget that she has taken care of both Charlotte and her brother Gabriel for the past few years. She complains to Serge:

> For five years I haven't been out of this house, did you know that? It's true! I don't even know where the subway is. I couldn't even find the church on the corner without getting lost. God knows, I'm just as sick as she is, so why is it always me who has to do all the work? (33)

She corners Serge:

> No, things have got to change, Serge. Three sick people in one house, it's no good, I tell you....Why don't you come back? If you don't come back...Well, they're my own flesh and blood, but... I might have to leave...Your room's still there, we never touched it. Aunt Charlotte wanted to take it, but I wouldn't let her...'cause I know you've got a good heart...Will you do that for your aunt? Will you? Your aunt will be waiting for an answer. (34)

At present, Albertine has nothing in her life except the television. She believes that if Serge came home to live with Gabriel, Charlotte, and herself, all her troubles would vanish. She has not been out of the house in five years and has grown to hate her daily existence. If Albertine wants to make sure she gets out of her situation she must take responsibility for her own escape and not regard Serge as her only saviour.

While Albertine wants Serge to move in, Charlotte wants to move out, and move in with Serge. With a little trepidation, she asks Serge,

> If your aunt promised to give you a little money every month, would you take her to live with you? I wouldn't take up much room, you know. I wouldn't make any noise. I'd stay out of your way...Just a tiny room. Will you do that for your aunt? Will you? When will you give me an answer? (35)

Charlotte does not consider any other options which may be more feasible; rather she zeroes in on Serge and regards him as her one-way ticket out of her present living situation. Both Charlotte and Albertine have children of their own. They should target them, if they haven't already, and stop pressuring Serge for promises and commitments.

Charlotte, like her niece Monique, uses pills to help her through the day. Monique observes her aunt, and remarks to Serge: "Do you think I want to end up like Aunt Charlotte, a slave to her bloody tranquilizers?" (36) In Charlotte, Tremblay provides the audience with an unflattering image of the future Monique. Albertine outlines to Serge, Charlotte's abuse of pills:

> She gets three cheques at the beginning of each month, and three days later there isn't a penny left. She's spent it all on pills! She takes so many bloody pills, sometimes I think she's in a coma! Sometimes I find her on the floor beside the bed...drugged! (37)

Charlotte tells Serge of her paranoia regarding her tranquilizers:

> Everytime I take a pill I have to

> check the bottles to make sure she
> hasn't switched them on purpose. (38)

After initially welcoming Serge home, Charlotte asks him for money. She has spent all of her money on her addiction to tranquilizers. Pills have not furnished a foolproof release for Charlotte, as she is still unhappy in her home, and by approaching Serge to take her in to live with him reveals that she is still searching for an alternate way out.

There is one woman in the play who Tremblay uses to contrast all the others - Nicole. Nicole is the youngest of the sisters, the most mature, and the one who is the most well-adjusted. She places no demands on Serge and permits him to freely arrive at his own decisions in regard to their relationship. She does not set out to push him, seduce him, or trap him. She does not use Serge as an escape vehicle. Serge and Nicole are in love with each other and are forced to deal with these feelings of incest as well as the outside world's condemnation of their actions. The purpose for Serge's trip to Europe was to give him the opportunity to work through his feelings for Nicole and reconcile himself to the fact that he is in love with his sister. He needed to do this away from the intrusive scrutiny of his family. The conclusion he arrived at, while away, is made very clear in his speech to Lucienne,

> So, here I am in the arms of Nicole and she's thirty and I'm twenty-five. So you can well imagine I've been asking myself some pretty hard questions. Okay, I'm with Nicole now, but is that really what I want? Am I happy with Nicole? Well, Lucienne, after three months without her, I can tell you yes, I am happy with Nicole and yes, I'm going to stay with her....It's clear, it's simple, and I know what I'm doing. What I feel for Nicole and what Nicole feels for me is love, Lucienne. It's love and it's real. It's not a matter of protection or security, it's love. And it's beautiful. So don't let anyone tell me I don't have the right, because I do have the right. I have the right to be happy like anyone else and I'm lucky because I've found my happiness. Maybe I've found it in my own sister, but I'm through being ashamed of it. And if the rest of you lead shitty lives with your shitty husbands at least have some respect for us, because we're happy. We're going to live, Lucienne, we're going to help each other live. We're going to live together without hurting one another. (39)

Serge has put much thought and time into his relationship with Nicole. He is not using her to gain something or to fill a basic lacking need inside of himself. His trip to Europe has given him the security and confidence to know that this relationship with Nicole is what he really wants.

Nicole has used the time apart from Serge to consider the consequences of a relationship with her brother. She has not jumped into this situation lightly, and has taken time to make sure this is what she wants. On Serge's return she tells him,

> Before you left, we said that while you were gone we'd think everything over, but the minute you got on the plane, I knew it was all thought out in advance. I love you...and I'm ready to face all the

> problems. It's our life Serge, yours and mine. We mustn't let other people spoil it. (40)

Later in the play, Nicole reveals to Serge,

> Before I got your first letter, I started to think you'd forgotten me. Stupid, eh? I told myself maybe we were right to separate. Maybe now that he's there he's realized he's better off without me...It's crazy the stuff you imagine when you're waiting to hear from someone. A month is a long time. I was so happy to finally hear from my...lover...And not only that, but you said you were lonely. And that you loved me. And you said it was going to be tough, but that you'd stick it out for the three months. I'm glad you stayed the three months. This way we know for sure. (41)

Nicole must be secure in her own feelings before she can share them with Serge. She has faced her inner fears and has worked through them in an emotionally healthy manner. Nicole is not running away from or avoiding a stressful situation in her life. She has risen above the need to escape. Serge is not an answer to a problem or an escape tool to be used. Nicole is the healthy alternative to the other women of Bonjour, là, Bonjour.

Bonjour, là, Bonjour has Serge visiting each sister and his two aunts and father at their respective homes. All are on stage for the duration of the play. Lighting and minimal props play key roles in delineating each household, each acting area. At times Serge carries on two to three conversations with different characters at the same time. Some of his one-line responses act as different answers to questions directed at him by different sources. For example:

> Lucienne: So, you had a good trip. Tell me all about it.
> Monique: How much do I owe you?
> Serge: Forget it...
> Monique: Don't be silly, you're not going to pay for my pills....
> Lucienne: I suppose you've told Papa about it and you don't feel like starting over. (42)

Serge's, "Forget it" is in direct response to both Lucienne's and Monique's previous statements. Serge is the only visual linking device between family members.

With all eight actors onstage, each one is able to hear the entire play. For the most part, however, Serge is the only character who hears anyone else speak; he is the only one who truly listens. Each character is tucked away in his or her own private world; no one ever hears anyone else speak. They all live in their own homes, isolated from one another. Tremblay comments visually on the play's strong theme of isolation by having the characters physically isolated from each other onstage. The silent uncommunicative bodies onstage convey to an audience that there is no communication between the family members, which translates emotionally to a lack of family love or support.

In the late 1970's, director André Brassard staged a production of Bonjour, là, Bonjour where he set each family member at the same dining room table. Brassard's choice carries the theme of isolation and entrapment to its visual limit: family members seated at the same table, not hearing each other's cries for help. Tremblay has set up his play where not every character is involved in every scene, but by having them at a table as a silent presence, they do, in fact, provide a strong comment on the ongoing action. They are too caught up in their own problems, with blinders on, to listen to the others.

The isolation of the characters, both physically on the stage and emotionally, deepens the "la maudite vie plate" trap in which the characters exist. They are trying to escape from this trap through their various means. This is manifested in the staging, with each household's area being created by light. A small pool of light defines each acting area, creating a striking cell-like visual image. The highly fragmented stage space underlines the barriers that exist between the characters.

Tremblay has the old aunts, Albertine and Charlotte, say many of their lines in unison. The result is a realization that neither one is very different from the other. They complain about the same things and are much more similar than either would ever admit. When asking Serge to get them out of their present living condition, both women, together, complain: "She phones up the whole family to complain about me." (43) At the end ot the scene they both ask Serge: "Will you do that for your aunt? Will you?" The audience views the aunts with Serge's eyes -

they are interchangeable.

Albertine and Charlotte act as a small chorus in Bonjour, là, Bonjour. They are two old widows who have nothing better to do than to sit around gossiping and watching other people's every move. In certain instances they act like a Greek chorus, observing the action and then providing comment. They both cannot wait to tell Serge that Gabriel saw Lucienne on the street with a man other than her husband. They both announce:

> Your father ran into your sister Lucienne on
> la rue Ste-Catherine the other day......
> Your father ran into your sister Lucienne on
> la rue Ste-Catherine the other day and.....
> She was with another man...Some young fella. (44)

They say these lines before Lucienne reveals to Serge the details of her affair with Robert. The lines have more of a sharp edge to them and are heightened with two voices saying them. With the main focus of this scene on Serge and Lucienne, Albertine and Charlotte are off to the side, providing an outside viewer's comments on the situation and the scene. They warn the audience of what is to come in the scene between Serge and Lucienne, and provide Serge with the information he requires later to answer Lucienne's questions about whether or not the family knows about her affair. A matter of discretion in some families, Lucienne's affair is loudly broadcast for all to hear by Charlotte and Albertine. Shortcomings and faults are preyed on in this family and Lucienne's is given extra focus through a repetition of the aunt's lines and the volume generated by two voices in unison.

For the women of _Bonjour, là, Bonjour_ Serge represents the one line they all cling to in hopes of obtaining something better. Not one woman in the play, with the exception of Nicole, looks to herself to find the root of her unhappiness. Thematically, Serge is the lifeline out for these women and this is reinforced visually by Tremblay. Onstage, the women never physically leave their homes; Serge travels to them. Serge brings Monique pills; Charlotte wants him to bring her money; Lucienne is having an affair with Robert, Serge's friend from outside the world of the family, and she wants Serge to be responsible for her cover-up in the outside world. Physically these women are stuck in their homes and emotionally they are stuck as well, depending on Serge to bring them that crucial piece they need for their escape. Serge, therefore, with his physical entrance into their homes, brings with him the emotional lifelines these women cling to from the outside world.

ENDNOTES

[1] Renate Usmiani, *Michel Tremblay* (Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 1982), p. 47.

[2] Michel Tremblay, *Bonjour, là, Bonjour*, trans. John Van Burek and Bill Glassco (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1975), p. 28.

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 29.

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 15.

[5] *Ibid.*, pp. 30-31.

[6] *Ibid.*, p. 21.

[7] *Ibid.*, p. 30.

[8] *Ibid.*, p. 24.

[9] *Ibid.*, p. 38.

[10] *Ibid.*, p. 26.

[11] *Ibid.*, p. 44.

[12] *Ibid.*, p. 17.

[13] *Ibid.*, p. 26.

[14] *Ibid.*, p. 45.

[15] *Ibid.*, pp. 69-70.

[16] *Ibid*., p. 69.

[17] *Ibid*., p. 69.

[18] *Ibid*., p. 33.

[19] *Ibid*., p. 53.

[20] *Ibid*., p. 21.

[21] *Ibid*., p. 23.

[22] *Ibid*., p. 26.

[23] Usmiani, op. cit., p. 156.

[24] Tremblay, op. cit., p. 51.

[25] *Ibid*., p. 52.

[26] *Ibid*., pp. 52-53.

[27] *Ibid*., p. 28.

[28] *Ibid*.,p. 19.

[29] *Ibid*., p. 52.

[30] *Ibid*., pp. 80-81.

[31] *Ibid*., pp. 63-64.

[32] *Ibid*., p. 53.

[33] *Ibid.*, p. 40.

[34] *Ibid.*, pp. 42-43.

[35] *Ibid.*, pp. 42-43.

[36] *Ibid.*, p. 52.

[37] *Ibid.*, pp. 41-42.

[38] *Ibid.*, p. 42.

[39] *Ibid.*, pp. 73-74.

[40] *Ibid.*, p. 37.

[41] *Ibid.*, pp. 74-75.

[42] *Ibid.*, p. 18.

[43] *Ibid.*, p. 41.

[44] *Ibid.*, p. 20.

CHAPTER FOUR

DAMNEE MANON, SACREE SANDRA

In his 1977 play, *Damnée Manon, Sacrée Sandra*, Michel Tremblay explores the world of the sacred and the profane - their differences and their similarities. Manon, the daughter of Marie-Louise and Leopold from *Forever Yours, Marie-Lou*, represents the sacred; she looks to religion to provide her with emotional happiness and contentment. Sandra, who Tremblay first introduced in *Hosanna* and later used in *Saint Carmen of the Main*, is a male transvestite who represents the profane. Manon encloses herself in a house full of religious icons and symbols; in this surrounding she feels safe and protected. Often mistaken for a nun by her neighbours, she has lost any sense of personal definition and is strictly devoted to God. Sandra's life is dominated by sex and physical pleasure to which she looks to provide herself with happiness and contentment. Hiding behind different faces and costumes, Sandra has lost every tie to her past and can no longer uncover any part of her true self. Sandra lives in a world where instant gratification is sought after, and achieved through, acts of sexual pleasure. Louise Forsyth notes of the play:

> In this play made up of two monologues, interwoven for contrapuntal effect, Tremblay has dramatized the strong Manichean tradition in Quebec. Manon and Sandra are dramatic representations of this duality. Neither alone is whole. They are divided women who have both tried

> to stifle and destroy parts of themselves; for one it is the body, for the other the spirit. (1)

Manon and Sandra use their respective obsessions to escape from parts of themselves and reality. They hide behind religion and sex to insulate themselves from the outside world and from what an exploration of their inner selves might reveal. Religion and sex crush any inner cries of discontent. Manon and Sandra work hard to keep themselves on their one track, but neither of their choices proves entirely successful. In a surprising twist at the end of the play, Manon and Sandra realize that they are both creations of an author's mind. Manon yells in her final plea to God: "I believe in you. So you believe in me! Even...if...I have...been...invented...by Michel." (2) Sandra's closing line of the play is a plea to Manon: "Take me with you, because I don't exist either! I too have been invented!" (3) Manon and Sandra represent two opposite and complementary aspects of the author's personality, and merge together at the end to form a balanced whole, returning to the author's imagination from whence they came.

Damnée Manon, Sacrée Sandra opens with Manon's line: "The solution to everything.....is God." (4) Rocking in a chair in her kitchen, Manon is dressed in black and surrounded by white walls. She avoids the outside world through a life of pious seclusion, living in the house in which she was brought up. Her mother, Marie-Louise, as depicted in Forever Yours, Marie-Lou, was a cold, bitter woman who passed on to Manon her fanatical religious ways. Manon still lives under the strong influence of her mother and uses her teachings to guide her life. The old house serves to shield her from life's harshness and pain. Forsyth remarks:

> Manon believes it is divine will that she perpetuate her mother, Marie-Louise, whose religious zeal had turned her into a frigid martyr, filled with self-pity... Manon's religious faith comes to her out of the past and binds her to that past. It isolates her from the present and does not look at all to the future. (5)

Elaine Nardocchio adds:

> It was her convent days that instilled in Marie-Louise (A Toi, pour toujours, ta Marie Lou, 1971) such a fear of sexual relations with her husband, Leopold. Her daughter Manon, who reappears in Damnée Manon, Sacrée Sandra (1976), eventually turns into a frustrated religious fanatic and sadly ironic caricature of the type of nuns that must have taught her mother. (6)

Sandra observes Manon from across the street and notes:

> I saw her turn the corner, all bundled up in her old maid's outfit, her hair pulled back, her eyes to the ground, looking at the tips of her shoes, her little waddle of a walk... The minute I saw her, I knew she was impregnable, inviolable, inapprochable, smooth as a stone, slippery as moss, cold as an ice-floe. Impossible to touch. Like her mother. For two years, I've watched Manon dry up like a raisin and I've never dared speak to her. She doesn't know I'm here..When I feel like crying I go and stick my nose to the window

> and stare at Manon's closed Venetian blinds. Sometimes a faint little light, yellow, almost dirty sneaks out through the metal strips, the bars of her prison. (7)

The house Manon chooses to lock herself up in is flooded with bad memories of an emotionally sterile family life - a cold bitter mother and alcoholic father. The rue Fabre house, however, isolates her and is familiar enough to her not to be threatening; it provides her with an escape into a comfortable womb-like world. Hiding from real life through her past will keep her safe.

Manon does not know how to be herself. She considered her mother a saint and idolized her. The simplest way for her to become a saint is to imitate her mother. Manon is playing a role that she forced herself into a long time ago. She tells God:

> Do you remember that afternoon? You told me Yourself, inside me. You softly, but firmly murmured in my ear that my place wasn't there, but here. In my mother's bed, in my mother's life...You ordered me to perpetuate my mother who was a saint... even though it cost me dearly. (8)

Manon has lost any traces of her real self. She has an obsession with her mother and is hiding behind playing the role of her mother. Like Sandra, she is putting on a disguise to shield her true self from life's pain and disappointment.

Religion is the prime directing force in Manon's life. It provides her with security and acts as a barrier to keep out the threat of real life. Her references to God dominate the play:

> There's nothing you do, nothing you say that doesn't have God at the end of it. (9)
>
> Sometimes I try to imagine something....I don't know....just some ordinary thing, or some big thing that's very, very important, that doesn't remind me of God...and I can't find one. (10)
>
> Nothing's too beautiful for God. (11)
>
> What did I ever think about before I thought of that (God)? I can't remember...I was too young. (12)

Religion and God permeate every thought and action of Manon's existence. When she is walking down the alley she finds an old missal stuck to the bottom of a garbage can. Instantly, she thinks it is a signal from God; a test to see how she will act. Every moment of her day can somehow be traced to God.

When things go wrong in Manon's life, prayer is the only answer. When Manon was frightened as child by her neighbour Helene, Marie-Louise's response was to pray. Manon says:

> We both got down on our knees and prayed for her....no....no....we didn't pray for her...we prayed to God that he'd get rid of her as fast as he possibly could. (13)

Manon learned early in life that to escape problems one had only to pray. Confronting a problem or a fear oneself was never an option. Like the women of Tremblay's past plays, Manon takes no assertive steps or responsibility for her own well-being. As the women of Les Belles Soeurs looked to bingos and contests for instant solutions, so Manon looks to prayer for quick and sure answers.

Manon's emotional make-up is dictated by and defined by God. When she leaves her newly acquired rosary in a garbage can and then retrieves it, she feels it has been a test of her faith. Manon states:

> When I finally got up, I was completely at peace. I understood everything that had happened to me...God wanted to test me like He did Abraham when He asked him to kill his little boy in the story of the burning bush. God asked me to sacrifice what was dearest to me in the whole world and I did it! It was his way of saying, 'You've done enough, Manon, go along home now and be happy.' (14)

She is proud because she has pleased God. Nothing is done for herself or for self enjoyment. In her relationship with God Manon speaks to him as if he were a lover, demanding a commitment from him. She tells God:

> I have a right to my pleasures! I have a right! I'm used to them now! I like what You did for me and I want to continue! You don't ask a poor girl to sacrifice herself for fifteen years and then drop her. Can't you see I need you? If one day goes by, one single day, that You don't come to see me, I'm warning You, I'll go crazy and then I'll be capable of anything...That little bit of Yourself You give to me alone, what's become of that? You've given it to someone else...No, that cannot be! You can't cheat me like that, walk away as if You didn't need me any more! (15)

These threatening words sound like those of a jilted lover fighting to hang on to her mate. She depends on God in the same way that many of Tremblay's other women depend on husbands and lovers. Manon demands that God continue to provide her with a state of emotional happiness and security.

Manon reveals midway through the play a dream she has had. In this dream, a woman, who is a combination of the Virgin Mary, Helene, and her childhood friend Michel (Sandra), wears green nail polish and lipstick, and touches and caresses Manon's body all over. Manon cannot resist the sweet caresses; this gentle stroking awakens her suppressed sexual desire.

> The woman who's damned and all painted green threw herself on me and she was saying things...things...they were so gentle. Yes, it was gentle. And it was good. She touched me all over, just like I'd touched the body of our Lord. (16)

Manon is enticed by these feelings of physical pleasure. Earlier in the play, she had to stop herself from warmly kissing the body of Christ on the cross of her rosary.

> I held my hands on the body of our Lord who suffered so much for us...when all of a sudden...I felt this need...I felt this terrible need to kiss him...I couldn't understand...I had the cucifix in my hands and...All of a sudden, I started kissing the body of Our Lord, as if it were the last thing I would do in my life. (17)

Manon is terrified of this part of herself, having blotted it out for so many years. Marie-Louise warned her about the dirtiness of sex and the ugly impurity of intercourse. The sensual side of Manon is drawn to these physical pleasures, but her rational religious mind tells her to stay away; only evil things can come from such indulgences. Ironically, it is her sexuality that in the end will prove most useful in helping her achieve the ultimate spiritual experience with God.

Up until now Manon has been able to feel, simply by praying, the presence of God in herself and through herself. Like a dose of drugs for an addict, however, it has become more and more difficult for her to achieve the same spiritual transcendence with the same prayers, concentration, and effort. Manon pleads to God:

> You don't come to see me so often any more. I don't feel Your hand on my hand or my head like before...Now, I need ten times the energy, ten times the concentration to finally feel Your breath in my soul. Before, I had only to think of You and Your breath would carry me off...You made me happy, perfectly happy for fifteen years... Today, I still haven't succeeded. I haven't felt Your presence for a second! It's the first time that's ever happened. (18)

Manon must work harder and harder to reach the same level of spiritual union she had achieved in her previous communions with God. What eventually gives her the fulfilling spiritual feeling she craves is her sexual self. As she becomes less inhibited sexually, she becomes more forceful; this is illustrated through her speech which takes on a highly charged sensual tone:

> I feel You coming...yes, yes closer... Come closer and I'll forgive You for everything! Haaa...yes...take my hand....take me away....Ah! Higher! I'm ready now! Higher! Crush me beneath Your weight. Make of me a thing deformed, twisted, but holy; let me limp in the fringe of Your will! Let me obey! (19)

> Yes, it was gentle. And it was good. She touched me all over, just like I'd touched the body of our lord. (20)

Manon's religious fervour starts to carry heavy sexual overtones. By the end of the play, her sexual side has merged with her religious side, allowing her to achieve the ultimate spiritual and emotional union with God. The uncontrollable part of herself, which she had feared and blocked out for so long, surfaces. With the emergence of her sexuality comes a conquering of her fear of it. Manon's final union with her saviour, proves successful as she uses a part of herself. Coached by Sandra, while the two of them join together at the end of the play to re-enter the author's imagination, Manon releases the sexual being from within herself. Her successful escape has, in the end, come from within.

Sandra is the antithesis of Manon. Sandra is a male transvestite who seeks an escape from herself through sordid sexual adventures and fantasies. She occupies her mind with plans for new costumes and ideas for escapades in order to keep the germ of "la maudite vie plate" silenced and buried. As a young boy, Sandra (Michel) lived on rue Fabre. Michel and Manon were born on the same day and became best friends while growing up. Sandra calls Manon her sister...her twin. Sandra (Michel) loved Manon, but lost touch with her when she escaped from rue Fabre. In the play Sandra has recently returned to rue Fabre, and lives in a house across the street from Manon. Sandra, dressed in white, is located for the duration of the play in her dressing room, which is completely black. Sandra's opening line of the play sets the tone for her character: "It doesn't matter who, doesn't matter when, where or why, the answer is always to fuck." (21) Whereas Manon's life was ruled by religion, Sandra's is ruled by sex. Tremblay instantly sets up the thematic debate onstage in the first lines of the play: the sacred versus the profane. Renate Usmiani observes:

> Sandra's character is based on an insatiable sensuality. She freely admits that her entire life has been dedicated to the pursuit of pleasures of the flesh. As soon as she wakes up, she inspects herself from head to toe. (22)

Sandra shuts out the outside world and suppresses any inner feelings of discontent by escaping through sex and erotic fantasies.

Sandra escaped the confining world of rue Fabre for the bright lights and excitement of the Main. It is as a member of this latter dark world that Tremblay first introduced Sandra in Hosanna and in Saint Carmen of the Main. Sandra has not found the escape into the world of the Main successful. Like Pierrette Guerin of Les Belles Soeurs, Sandra is now returning back to the world from which she originally fled. Sandra reveals of her return:

> They accepted me pretty fast around here...without ever knowing who they were dealing with. I moved back to Fabre Street right across from the house where I was born. When I saw the ad in the paper two years ago, I couldn't believe my eyes....It's incredible how little Fabre Street has changed. Just aged a bit. But not changed. To have been a child on Fabre Street is a privilege that leaves an indelible trace. (23)

Sandra keeps moving around hoping that one day she will find a place where she can settle and be content. A change of physical location proves unsatisfactory in helping Sandra escape the demons existing deep in her soul.

Sandra uses sex as her escape. It gives her periods of pleasure, of feeling needed and wanted; it provides her with instant gratification and self-esteem. Her escape through sex, however, is dependent on a man; her happiness is subject to another person filling a need inside of her. Sandra admits:

> Why ask yourself why, it's stupid. Especially when you can fuck, so you don't have to think. Survival by fuck! Survival by itself...imposssible. It's got to be accompanied by something ...something enveloping...and warm. I really can't think of anything but fucking to keep me alive...At times...

> anyone will do the trick. When you get to the point you'll take no matter what, then a fuck from no matter who will make you happy, no matter how badly he does it. As long as it's still a fuck. (24)
>
> My cock commands; me, I obey! A slave? Of course! When I'm neither on the prowl nor fucking, I'm not alive. The rest is filler. (25)

Sandra uses sex for survival. She clings to it as if it were her lifeline, her only reason to exist.

Sandra's estimation of her self-worth and her lover's worth is defined in very cold terms. She reports:

> I'm sick of being for them what they are for me...one among many. A number! A three-star fuck...or two-star... or one-star. A gourmet meal or a bowl of slop. Seventh heaven or the fifth basement. I want to be the last. The last one to award the stars. The last one with the right to put the mark of quality on a piece of ass, like the stamp on a ham. (26)

Sandra's lovers' opinions do matter to her; thus, she is not as detached from them as she pretends to be. It is these very opinions and judgments that form her self-worth. She cannot find any value in herself by looking inside and taking stock of good traits and characteristics; she does not even try. She does not have the ability to depend on herself to create a positive self-image both inside and out. Her happiness, therefore, is fully dependent on another person's opinions.

Sandra's flight into a world of sexual adventures with men leaves her feeling emotionally barren, and cracks soon begin to appear in her carefree, flippant facade:

> Well, all that's very nice, but there are times you wake up, eh, and even if you know you're still tempting, there's this empty feeling inside...As if.... something's missing. (27)

Usmiani notes:

> The pleasure Sandra takes in her own physique and its potential for pleasure is not strong enough to counterbalance the second, more serious, aspect of her personality: a sense of essential dissatisfaction, for deep down within Sandra, the worm of 'la maudite vie plate', the finite nature of the human condition itself, is gnawing away. Beneath the satisfaction afforded by her many professional triumphs, there lurks anger and disappointment. While she gloats over her number of lovers, she knows very well that at the bottom she is nothing more for them but a 'one, two, or three star fuck.' (28)

Sandra's ultimate loneliness is revealed through her wistful observation of Manon. She imagines Manon's cozy existence and briefly loses herself in these thoughts. Sandra remembers a childhood of warmth and love; she reveals:

> When I feel like crying, I go and stick my nose to the window and stare at Manon's closed Venetian blinds. I have found someone truly happy whom I can watch live in her happy mouse-like life surrounded by the decor of my own happy childhood. And I am reassured. About everything. (29)

Sandra's attempt to stuff full the emotional gap in herself with sex has failed. What can be a very loving, warm, passionate experience has turned into a purely lustful, selfish, physical act with a very hard and uncaring edge to it. When Sandra speaks of her lover, she only speaks of him in a very coarse way - his body, his sexual prowess, and his magnetism; she never mentions any type of emotional bond of friendship or commitment existing between the two of them. Sandra unwisely compensates for the desolate emptiness growing inside of her by escaping deeper and deeper into a world of vulgar sensuality and purely lustful eroticism. The cause directly follows the effect. For Sandra her vicious cycle continues.

Sandra escapes into a world of costumes and make-up in the hopes of losing her essence through different personas. When she was a young boy, Michel - before she became Sandra of the Main, she used to dress up like Batman and scare the neighbourhood children.

> It's me who made myself a Batman costume and haunted the alleys at night to scare you. If you only knew. If you only knew how it's me who was scared. I pretended to be brave and you thought I was brave. I pretend to be a woman and you think I am a woman. I've always fooled you because I had to, but if you only knew....(30)

Dressing up allowed Michel (Sandra) to hide behind a mask; fears were hidden by costumes and roles. Michel felt protected in this world of make-believe and play-acting.

Sandra, at her present age, is still playing different roles and hiding behind costumes. When she returned to rue Fabre, she met with her landlord:

> I trotted right over, disguised as a quiet, young steneographer, yet another of my dazzling compositions. The landlord never had a clue, my handwriting's illegible. (31)

During the course of the play, Sandra concocts an idea to dress up like the Virgin Mary to welcome her lover home. She fantasizes:

> I found my masquerade for today. While doing my first nail a while ago, I found the face the variable Sandra will don tonight. I have decided it will be the Virgin Mary herself who will receive a Martiniquais in her bed tonight. A new role. A new composition. The Mother of us all. I'll stand in the corner of my room in my white dress, my blue cape and my little gold belt...He'll lift my dress from behind. I won't move. My arms open. The frozen smile. But green! Saint Sandra the Green of the Fire Sale! (32)

Sandra blocks out the truth and reality by fleeing into these masked charades, always taking on a role, never playing herself. She erects a wall between her lover and herself blocking out any trace of vulnerability or real feeling. Sandra's lover is always making love to a disguised character. Sandra is twice removed from her true self; Michel playing Sandra playing a part.

By continually dressing up and acting out parts, Sandra has lost any real trace of who she once was; her face is deeply buried underneath a myriad of powders and grease paints. Towards the end of the play she reveals:

> I scrubbed and scrubbed. I wiped my face completely away. I pulled my hair back with an elastic...I have the

> honour to officially declare that
> of the man I was not a single trace
> remains. Nothing! However much I looked,
> dug, examined...I could not find
> myself. My own face has ceased to exist.
> Completely vanished beneath the tons
> of make-up to which I have subjected it,
> vanished behind the dozens, the hundreds
> of other faces I've drawn in its place...
> When I remove my make-up, my eyes
> disappear, my mouth shrinks, my eyebrows
> move, my cheeks puff up...and none of it
> goes together. The hundred other faces
> of women that I've drawn, that I've
> created myself, look more like me than
> what's left underneath. To find myself
> naked in front of a mirror, exactly as
> Mother Nature created me, gives me
> vertigo of nothingness. I don't exist
> any more. (33)

Hundreds of faces have come and gone on Sandra and, sadly, no vestige of the original Michel remains. Throughout the constant transformations Sandra has lost herself and nothing permanent has replaced it. Sandra has escaped into so many faces that no real self identity exists.

At the end of the play, Sandra and Manon realize that they are dual creations of an author's imagination. They only exist in his mind and must now return to it. In her final words, Manon screams:

> Hurry, come take me, I feel that I
> only exist inside someone else's head!...
> All I have left are the rewards I offer
> myself for my faith in You. I believe in
> You. So You believe in me! Even...if...
> I have...been...invented...by...Michel. (34)

Sandra's words end the play:

> Take me with you, because I don't exist
> either! I, too, have been invented!
> Look, Manon! Look! His light is coming! (35)

The two characters then merge to form one in anticipation of their return to the author's mind. In a selfless act, Sandra gives her sexual self to Manon so Manon can experience the ultimate spiritual and sexual union with God: body and soul. Manon needs to physically feel the presence of God:

> I'm ready now! Higher! Crush me beneath Your weight. Make of me, a thing deformed, twisted, but holy, let me limp in the fringe of Your will. (36)

As Manon achieves her state of ecstasy, Sandra pleads to go with her:

> Keep going...right to the end! Go to the end of your journey! Climb! Climb! Climb! And take me with you! I want to leave. (37)

Nardocchio remarks:

> Although both individuals have obviously gone their separate ways since their youth, they have become equally frustrated and degenerate on both the religious and sexual level. The difficult search for some sort of spiritually satisfying experience, whether it be political, religious, or sexual, is a dominant message in Tremblay's work. (38)

Sandra joins Manon in her flight as they both face a very intense, blinding light leading them towards their final escape away, back into the author's psyche to form the collective consciousness. The sacred and the profane; one cannot block out the other nor should it try. A solid balance of the two forces, Tremblay illustrates, makes for a healthy emotional and spiritual existence.

Damnée Manon, Sacrée Sandra is a highly theatrical play, staged in a stylized fashion. When the lights come up at the beginning of the play, the physical contrast between Manon and Sandra is instantly visible to an audience. Manon is in a white kitchen dressed in black, and Sandra is in her black dressing room dressed in white. Visually, they are exact opposites. However, Tremblay is careful to link them through a visual element. What makes them different to the eyes of the audience also ties to them to each other: the same colours, albeit used differently, are found in both rooms and in the costumes; this creates a visual connection. The black and white further connects to the thematic issue of the play. At the outset Manon is all religion and Sandra all sexual; they are extremes, just as black and white are in a colour scheme. Tremblay comments:

> Life can't be grey on stage. It's got to be black or white. There's no middle ground in the theatre because theatre is there to announce, to say things. The basic problems are always all black or all white. (39)

Damnée Manon, Sacrée Sandra certainly fits into Tremblay's ideal of putting black and white on the stage. Through the physical set-up of the stage, Tremblay comments on his subject matter. As the play thematically is about two sides, or two halves of a whole, Tremblay wisely divides the stage into half with one side representing the profane, the other the sacred, and each character controlling her own area. Each physical area, however, is part of the larger whole stage, just as each part of Sandra and Manon are part of the larger mind of the author. The physical form underlines the content of the piece.

The loss of personal identity, a theme explored by Tremblay in the play, is given a visual reinforcement through costuming. Sandra is in her dressing room surrounded by cosmetics and previous disguises. The play opens with her putting on nail polish, getting ready to play another part. Her surrounding area is filled with other identities. Manon's costume also suggests a loss of personal identity. Her costume, severe and devout, resembles a nun's uniform. When recounting the tale of the purchase of the rosary, Manon reveals: "Then she asked me: 'Is it for a church, sister?' I went all red. It's not the first time I've been mistaken for a nun." (40) Sandra, at one point, observes how Manon walks: "her eyes to the ground, looking at the tips of her shoes, her little waddle of a walk, like an embarrassed nun." (41) The audience is thus given a visual element that complements the dialogue of the play and the depiction of the loss of personal identity.

With Sandra and Manon coming together at the end of the play to form a whole and return to the author's mind, Tremblay must find areas to link them so they do, in fact, appear as two sides of one coin. He has them utter a few key phrases in the play together. Before the play launches into Manon's first monologue, both characters state in unison:

> Sometimes I ask myself, what did I ever think about before I thought of that? I can't remember...I was too young. (42)

There is a key provided for the audience in these lines. Each character, thinking about her respective obsession, is experiencing an identical thought pattern or mind-set at the same moment. Aurally, the two voices become one, and a union between the two is established. At the end of the play, their mutual fear is expressed by having both women scream. Tremblay links the women thematically, in these instances, by using choral speech.

The characters use complementary gestures and facial expressions. At one point, near the beginning of the play, Tremblay sets out in his stage directions that both characters smile and continue smiling at the same moments. They both then set out to prepare their respective confessions. The similarity in gesture suggests that an audience is watching parts of the same person.

Images suggested through one character's lines are, at times, given a concrete visual form through the other character. As Manon relates an incident from her childhood, of how she was terrified of her neighbour's cousin, Hélène, because she wore green lipstick and green nail polish, Sandra is in her dressing room painting her nails green. While Manon tells of a nightmare she has had of the statue of the Virgin Mary with green lips and fingernails, touching and caressing her, Sandra adds on the final touches to her green nails and lipstick. Sandra decides her disguise for her lover that night will be the Virgin Mary. While Manon is describing her nightmare, Sandra is preparing to enact it. Sandra does don her Virgin Mary outfit making the nightmare a living reality. The audience is thus presented with an immediate image both aurally and visually. Manon's subconscious is placed on the stage for all to view. The audience is asked, by Tremblay, to participate in Manon's fears and experience the ugliness and frightening nature of the image of the Virgin Mary as it exists in her mind. In a similar instance, Sandra describes the personal joy she experiences in her observation of the mouse-like Manon, who hides behind her Venetian blinds with candles flickering in the background. While Sandra describes this scene the audience is at the same time witnessing it onstage in Manon's area. The audience actually sees what Sandra sees when she looks out her window. They are also privy to observing what, in fact, goes on behind the Venetian blinds.

As Manon and Sandra join in spirit at the end of the play, so do their actual lines. Their lines take the form of dialogue (most of the play is in the form of monologues) and follow each other. They also acknowledge each other's physical presence on the stage. Sandra actually turns to Manon, sees her, hears her, and speaks to her. As the two worlds they represent join to become one, so do Manon and Sandra, as characters, come closer together.

Tremblay was very prolific in the late 1960's and 1970's writing his own plays as well as working on adaptations and translations. He worked on scripts for television and film; some original and some screenplays for his plays. By 1977 he had become a much respected literary figure. The revolutionary ideas he had introduced into the areas of form, content, staging, and language no longer met with strong objections and harsh criticism. Damnée Manon, Sacrée Sandra marked the end of an era for Tremblay. In the next thirteen years he wrote fewer plays, but branched out into writing novels, and even adapting one of his plays into a full scale opera. His own personal roots, however, will always remain in rue Fabre. It is this very world of "la maudite vie plate" that he has to thank for giving him his start in writing.

ENDNOTES

[1] Louise Forsyth, "First Person Feminine Singular: Monologues by Women in Several Modern Quebec Plays," *Canadian Drama/L'Art Dramatique Canadien* 5. 2. (1979), p. 196.

[2] Michel Tremblay, *Damnée Manon, Sacrée Sandra*, trans. John Van Burek (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1981), p. 43.

[3] *Ibid*., p. 43.

[4] *Ibid*., p. 7.

[5] Forsyth, op. cit., p. 196.

[6] Elaine Nardocchio, "Church and State, Religion and Politics in Quebec Theatre," *Bulletin of Canadian Studies* 8. 2. (1983/84), p. 76.

[7] Tremblay, op. cit., pp. 40-41.

[8] *Ibid*., p. 34.

[9] *Ibid*., p. 7.

[10] *Ibid*., p. 8.

[11] *Ibid*., p. 10.

[12] *Ibid*., p. 10.

[13] *Ibid*., p. 27.

[14] *Ibid*., p. 21.

[15] *Ibid*., pp. 35-36.

[16] *Ibid*., p. 29.

[17] *Ibid*., p. 21.

[18] *Ibid*., pp. 34-35.

[19] *Ibid*., pp. 36 & 42.

[20] Ibid., p. 29.

[21] *Ibid*., p. 7.

[22] Renate Usmiani, *Michel Tremblay* (Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 1982), p. 22.

[23] Tremblay, op. cit., pp. 37-38

[24] *Ibid*., pp. 8-9.

[25] *Ibid*., p. 32.

[26] *Ibid*., p. 25.

[27] *Ibid*., p. 15.

[28] Usmiani, op. cit., pp. 141-142.

[29] Tremblay, op. cit., p. 41.

[30] *Ibid*., p. 39.

[31] *Ibid*., p. 37.

[32] *Ibid.*, p. 33.

[33] *Ibid.*, pp. 31-32.

[34] *Ibid.*, p. 43.

[35] *Ibid.*, p. 43.

[36] *Ibid.*, p. 42.

[37] *Ibid.*, p. 43.

[38] Elaine Nardocchio, *Theatre and Politics in Modern Quebec* (Edmonton: University of Alberta, 1986), p. 73.

[39] Alan Twigg, *For Openers: Conversations with Twenty-Four Canadian Writers* (Harbour: Madiera Park, 1981), p. 156.

[40] Tremblay, op. cit., p. 13.

[41] *Ibid.*, p. 39.

[42] *Ibid.*, p. 10.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE IMPROMPTU OF OUTREMONT

Michel Tremblay took a break from writing plays after Damnée Manon, Sacrée Sandra. His "Les Belles Soeurs" cycle was complete; he had said everything he had set out to say and did not want to keep writing on the same theme. By 1978 the world of the Main that Tremblay had known as a young man, and had written about, had all but disappeared. Rue St. Laurent was fast becoming home to chic night clubs and expensive boutiques. Ray Conlogue comments on Tremblay's departure from playwriting:

> Tremblay feels he has finished telling this story, about the same time as the real world it was modelled on has disappeared. The Main he knew, stippled with outcasts and derelicts, no longer exists. And the old Tremblay, the poor kid trained as a typographer, no longer exists. 'I am taking time out to figure what is the world I am living in now', he says. (1)

Tremblay concluded:

> After Saint Carmen and my last play (which is titled Holy Hell and forms the third part of the Marie-Lou trilogy) I don't feel needed in the theatre anymore. (2)

> Well what happened was that I realized, after having written Damnée Manon, Sacrée Sandra, that I didn't have anything else to say. It was very clear. That was the end of something. (3)

After a break of three years Tremblay's writing returned to the stage in 1980 with The Impromptu of Outremont.

The Impromptu of Outremont premiered at le Theatre du Nouveau Monde in April, 1980. Populated with the wealthy old French Canadian guard, Outremont is a world caught up in social manners that enjoys the world of ballet, opera, and traditional realistic theatre. Not written in "joual", and examining a world very foreign to that of rue Fabre and the Main, this play marked a departure for Tremblay from his usual milieu. Lisbie Rae observes:

> For years Tremblay had been the target of elitist criticism because of his use of 'joual' and his portrayal of the lower classes of Quebec society. He originally conceived _L'Impromptu_ as an author's defence against his critics, then added a second perspective by deciding to defend himself from within the enemy ranks -- the traditionally upper-class stronghold of Outremont. At the heart of the play's debate on culture and language lies a political message -- beware of the return of the right -- and an invitation to dismiss once and for all the cultural elite of Outrement...The ambivalence at the core of _The Impromptu of Outremont_ arises from Tremblay's decision to defend himself in absentia, putting only his critics on stage to condemn themselves out of their own mouths. (4)

The central milieu may have changed, and much of the thematic concern of _The Impromptu of Outremont_ was uncharted territory for Tremblay, but his focus remained on women.

The four women of _The Impromptu of Outremont_ meet one afternoon at the family house in which they were raised to celebrate the birthday of one of them. Rae notes:

> The four sisters of the Beaugrand family tear the family apart as the advent of a new culture (Tremblay's) forces them into opposing camps. The

> Outremont bourgeoisie thus both attacks and defends Tremblay while he, in turn, both condemns and understands them. (5)

Tremblay uses the Beaugrand sisters as his spokeswomen on culture. He also imbues them with enough life and individuality that they become real women, not just mouth pieces for a debate on culture. The Beaugrand sisters may come from a very different social background than the sisters of Les Belles Soeurs, but their quest for a successful escape is just as important to them as to their counterparts on rue Fabre. The Outremont world is a cell for these women, just as rue Fabre is a cell for Germaine Lauzon and her friends.

The Beaugrand sisters, Fernande, Yvette, Lorraine, and Lucille, were all brought up in a large austere home in Outremont. Guarded and disciplined by a strict mother, they are still suffering from the insecurities and psychological backlash that has evolved out of their upbringing. Their mother was a domineering, overbearing woman who put on airs and was caught up in a world of facades and social graces. She forced each daughter to pursue an art form: writing and dramatics for Fernande; voice for Yvette; piano for Lorraine; and dance for Lucille. Each daughter was to know her place in the Outremont social sphere and was not to overstep her boundaries. There were strict rules to be adhered to.

When one of her daughters began to excel at her chosen art form, Madame Beaugrand abruptly put an end to it. Yvette remembers her mother:

> Mother used to say: 'I want my daughters to leave their mark!' And she force-fed all four of us with singing lessons, piano flute, dance, dramatics...She even convinced us we all had talent! But when I wanted to be a real Maria Callas, not the lining, Mother looked at me as if I'd come from the moon. 'In our world, my child, we don't need to become artistes, we are artistes! But among ourselves! I want my daughters to leave their mark, but within their milieu!' So much for the dreams of the Beaugrand sisters. (6)

Lorraine recalls her mother saying:

> 'Above all, you must never tell anyone you have talent! Any talent you have belongs to us and to us alone, and you must never flaunt yourself before anyone else!' (7)

Talent, like everything else in Outremont, had its place. When each of the Beaugrand daughters was called on to display her talent for the Outremont intelligentsia, she had to be perfect. Talent remained in the home where it could be controlled and gauged.

Madame Beaugrand's obsessive attention to detail and social decorum made her a cold woman. The Outremont home brings back painful childhood memories to the Beaugrand sisters. Rae compares Tremblay's vision of family life to a prison cell:

> The family is a prison cell for all its members. A recurring theme in the Tremblay opus, the theme of the cell is defined as inability to

> communicate, inability to escape, inability to love. (8)

The Beaugrand sisters sadly remember the actions of their mother. Lucille states:

> Whenever the time came for explanations, or the moment to finally say something important, invariably she would trot out one of those pearls: 'The tea is cold!' or 'Oh dear, the clock is fast!' All to avoid a discussion. Our mother was the epitome of empty words. (9)

She continues:

> She, who had no luminaries in her obscure background and who always said: 'In my family tree, the celebrities aren't in the past, but in the future! I prefer the young buds to the old branches!' Our mother was a run-of-the-mill Tremblay and so ashamed of it, she'd pretend to have a bone caught in her throat if someone asked where she came from. (10)

In comparing Fernande, the oldest sister, to their mother, Lucille remarks:

> It's uncanny how you resemble her as you get older. You've become mannered, hypocritical, inhuman, meddlesome and calculating! Like her! And I know full well you hate her as much as we do. (11)

The austere lifestyle created by their mother, under which they were all raised, has scarred each of the Beaugrand sisters. So much of their lives have been unrealized because of the phobias and fears their mother instilled in them. Even dead, she still has enormous control over her daughters. Lucille points out to Lorraine and Fernande:

> Every time you two come here, Mother's ghost slips in amongst us and prevents us from

> saying clearly what we feel...We're
> always changing the subject without ever
> getting to the bottom, because twenty-five
> or thirty years ago, our Mother told us
> that fighting was ugly. (12)

The Beaugrand sisters have each worked in their own way to escape this past, but the strong matriarchical influence keeps hounding them. The past is limiting their freedom and stopping them from looking clearly into the future. Contentment and inner peace will never happen until they shed their mother's strict teachings, warped values, and unbending ideals.

Lucille, the youngest of the Beaugrand sisters at forty, has shut herself off from the outside world, choosing to live with her sister, Yvette. Lucille escapes into the protected family home, pushing back the threats and unknown forces present in the outside world.

Lucille is a revolutionary at heart, but she has never had the courage to go out and fight. The new breed of Quebecois artists rearing their heads excites Lucille. Within the confines of her own living room, she praises the new artists for their courage and spirit. Lucille is rooted in this living room, however, and will not take her opinions beyond it. She expresses her progressive views on the emerging art forms to Yvette:

> I say there has to be room for everything.
> For the back alley and the living room. The
> bottle of beer and the martini. There has to
> be room for both. Before, everything was for
> us. Everything was done in relation to us...

> Did we complain then that our 'art' was unfair, that another 'world' existed that also needed to be talked about? No, of course not! But now that a new generation of artists who don't think like ours did, who don't talk like ours, and who act instead of complaining, has displaced our holy elite, we cry scandal and treason! What I can't understand is why our holy elite doesn't react with a bit more spunk? Instead of cowering in the closet and feeling sorry for ourselves, why aren't we turning out creative people who will answer those others and speak up for us. (13)
>
> Tolerence, Yvette. It's so much more beautiful, so much cleaner, more respectable than contempt. (14)

Lucille appreciates the new artists as bold and creative. They express themselves with no inhibitions or constraining guidelines. The old guard should rise to the challenge and produce works of value themselves instead of sitting back, muttering about the emerging artists and new art forms. Artists should be inspiring each other to create. Fernande attacks Lucille's views:

> Who do you think you are? And what's all this about 'the call to revolution' and 'we'll all close ranks and show them who we are?' You shut yourself up here with Yvette at age thirty, as if you were ashamed! You never wanted to do a thing...You sit in the lap of luxury and bemoan the fate of mankind. And you talk about usefulness! You have the audacity to lecture us on the usefulness of art? Well, art is useful to those who deserve it, Lucille, and all you deserve is the grave you've dug for yourself and in which you're going to die. (15)

Lucille patiently responds:

> If we hadn't allowed our mother to run everything in our lives and to leave us so neutered, perhaps we wouldn't be in

> this mess today, feeling sorry for ourselves, our heads in the sand...Perhaps mother was more intelligent than we think. She managed to pass on to us her fear of everything. Her fear of losing what she already had. Her fear of losing what she might have had. Or what she should have had. Her fear of losing. Fear hovers over our days and feeds on our nights. (16)

Fear has been ingrained in Lucille since childhood and it has cut off any urges she might have had. Her escape into a progressive world with its fresh ideas and innovative forms is blocked by fear. As a result, she retreats into the regressive world of the family home.

Lucille uses humour to provide herself with a tiny respite from her empty day-to-day life. She is forever teasing Yvette, and Fernande is the usual target of her sarcastic wit. When talking about why she quit dancing, Lucille remarks:

> I saw myself in the mirror at ballet school, that was enough...Could you see me prancing around the living room, jumping over tables, cutting a swath between obese, perfumed women and gouty old men?...I do have a sense of the absurd and it's saved me from countless miseries. (17)

Humour and the art of bantering demand a sharp wit, a keen ear, and quick thinking. Lucille receives some satisfaction by being able to use these talents. Humour also provides her with a type of mask. Her true feelings of emptiness are hidden beneath her sharp tongue. Her sarcasm pushes people away, keeps them at a safe distance, and lets no one see the real pain.

Yvette is the quiet sensitive sister who, like Lucille, has closed herself off from the outside world, shutting herself up in the family home. Yvette is too afraid and too timid to venture beyond the safe world of Outremont. Because of her acute sensitivity, Yvette's emotional scars are the most apparent, the most painful to observe. The other sisters retreated from their "talents" when advised to by their mother, but Yvette clung to the hope that she would one day become an opera singer. Her mother forbid it. Yvette sadly remembers her pathetic decline from potential opera star to glorified lounge singer:

> I threw myself into the songs of Faure, Duparc and Debussy and I became a chanteuse de salon. The kind who bores everyone at every reception, because she keeps doing over and over again the same songs that people grow to hate because they've heard them so many times...Background music in chic surroundings. Muzak before its time. I never complained. And I never asked mother why I hadn't the right to become a real singer. Mother's decisions were not open to discussion. Ever. And when I stopped making a fool of myself behind white pianos with gilt edges, no one even noticed. (18)

Lorraine provides an outsider's view of Yvette:

> I could hear my sister Yvette talking of death, suicide, murder; I could see her throwing herself down the stairs in the hope of crippling herself for life; I could see her pouring herself a big glass of javex to kill that voice they'd pushed to develop, which they wanted to keep in a cage, here in this room, where I, too, toiled

> in vain. My sister Yvette is a nightingale who had her eyes poked out by our mother to amuse her circle of friends. (19)

Singing defined Yvette's self-worth, and with that gone, she has shrivelled up and lost her zest for life.

When left alone in the family home, Yvette regains her confidence and once again, like she did as a youngster, throws herself full force into singing selections from the great operas, pretending to be a grand diva. She reveals her secret pastime:

> Nowadays, when Lucille goes out shopping, I push the living room chairs and coffee tables against the wall...I run up to my room, pull the bedspread off the bed and take out of the closet old dressing gowns... Then I come back down here, place myself squarely in front of the stereo...And I die for love, to the sound of old Angel recordings, or London, or Deutsche Grammaphon...Like a dreaming child. Like an adolescent projecting herself into an improbable future...My greatest death, my most accomplished death, is from ennui, the all-consuming ennui of Dido, when Aeneas departs in search of his promised Italy! 'Remember Me...' Oh, it's true, I've worn out two recordings of that death...I've worn the voices of Kirsten Flagstad and Janet Baker to threads.....(20)

Yvette escapes into her tragic world of opera. Opera takes her away to exotic scenarios in far away lands and provides a release to her. She becomes the wounded heroine, thrashing through torment and pain. Opera allows Yvette to be bold, romantic, sensuous -- all those emotions that she keeps under a tight guard in everyday life. Behind the shuttered windows and closed doors, Yvette's emotions break out of their trap. The arias, reflecting the character's pain, provide Yvette with an emotional funnel to channel her own personal pain.

Yvette's final escape will be her death, and death weighs heavily on her mind. She is saddened by the thought that she will have left no visible trace on the world, that no one will remember her. Yvette reveals:

> When I die and my name is printed in the obituary column of 'La Presse", that will only be the second time it will have appeared in a newspaper. The first was my baptism...My life will have been as three suspension points between two spots of ink. Yvette Beaugrand, born 27 February, 1933, died, such-and-such a date... Between the two, nothing. Nothing! Not a trace. 'Remember Me'...There's nothing worse in this world than knowing you'll die without leaving a trace. That you will have lived for nothing. (21)

Yvette desperately wants to leave her mark on the world through her singing. That will never happen, as her voice has been stifled.

The song Yvette chooses to play over and over again is "Remember Me" from Dido and Aeneas. It is Dido's lament, sung while Aeneas departs for Italy. Dido sings:

> Thy hand, Belinda; darkness shades me: on thy bosom let me rest: More I would, but Death invades me: Death is now a welcome guest. When I am laid, am laid in earth, may my wrongs create no trouble, no trouble in thy breast; When I am laid, am laid in earth, may my wrongs create no trouble, no trouble in thy breast: Remember me, remember me; but ah! forget my fate. Remember me, but ah! forget my fate. (22)

Tremblay chooses Yvette's favourite opera piece with a keen ear. Yvette's state of mind parallels that of Dido. Like Dido, Yvette thinks often of dying and sees it coming. She is not afraid of death itself, but the forgetable memory of her life that will remain disappoints her. "Remember the essential me", Yvette pleads, "Forget what I became, my fate, what I was turned into." There is no voice, however, no romantic-tragic story, no contribution. Reality dictates that Yvette Beaugrand will be forgotten very soon after her death.

Fernande Beaugrand-Drapeau, the oldest of the Beaugrand sisters, tightly hangs on to the proper manners, speech, and rules of society that her mother drilled into her and her sisters. Fernande staunchly defends their mother and the upper-class Outremont way of life; therefore, she is an enemy to her sisters. Fernande's fears and dashed hopes are deeply buried inside of her. She does not let anyone get close to her and remains cold and distant. Fernande may have left the family home and escaped upwards to a bigger house in upper Outremont; she may have a family and an architect husband, but she is still fighting to escape the insecurities and fears instilled in her by her mother. Her escape to upper Outremont has, over time, proven unsuccessful.

Fernande lives in a large home protected by brick walls. Like her home, Fernande has erected walls around herself. When arguments get too heated or discussions start to crack away at her exterior, Fernande backs away, looks down her nose at her opponent, and with a sarcastic barb puts her adversary in their place.

Lucille says to Fernande:

> That's it, run away like her. You always manage to slip out of a discussion when you've lost command...That's lady-like, I suppose. (23)

When Fernande attacks Lorraine for speaking "joual" from her gut, Lorraine fights back:

> If that means you're going to speak like a book and censor yourself as you go along, by all means aim as high as you like...in any case, you'll end up short of breath! The air is thin at the summit, sister. (24)
>
> Everything's gotta be smooth and insipid to get your blessing, right? Delicate in consititution, so as not to shock your eyes; delicate in speech, so as not to damage your sensitive eardrums. As little contact as possible, because to touch too much is to want too much. (25)

Fernande concentrates so much on the exterior because she is terrified of the interior. She focuses on language and its rigid guidelines, as it has rules that can be monitored and controlled. When she remarks on something, her remarks always pertain to the appearance of something or the surface. In reference to the taxi driver: "Every time I find myself obliged to take a taxi, the driver is Haitian." (26) At the end of Act One she comments on Lorraine's language: "Ah, back to your street talk? Did you notice, Lorraine, that during our discussion you spoke like a girl from Outremont?" (27) Afraid of what an argument might produce or force her to face, Fernande hides behind a shallow world of proper social manners and behavior.

To get through her daily routine, Fernande has started to rely more and more on alcohol. With her children grown up and a husband whose career is not particularly brilliant, liquor helps to numb the loneliness. Fernande, in a rare vulnerable moment, opens up slightly to Lorraine and remarks:

> Do you know I wake up in the morning sometimes and wonder what can I dream up to get me through the day? Do you know I have my martini earlier than ever and more 'double' than ever? It's conceivable that before long, I'll have what's known as a drinking problem. (28)
>
> My children say I'm reactionary; my friends, that I'm indiscreet...My friends know how to disguise and sweeten what they have to say. I get right to the point. They hold it against me because I'm candid. To keep my friends, I'd have to be an expert in fable and metaphor. But I find that tiresome. Hence, the 'double double' martini. (29)

At middle age, cracks are beginning to appear in Fernande's severe exterior. She has played at life properly, obeying all the rules and social dictates. To be always in control was a lesson that was drilled into the Beaugrand sisters by their mother. Fernande heeded this advice and has kept her life in control by running away from any true passion or raw emotion. Alcohol provides an escape to Fernande from this tightly guarded emotionless life. It numbs her to the point that she can cope with her hollow existence; it helps to suppress any dark emotions that lurk beneath the surface that might burst through. Her increased consumption of alcohol is an indicator of just how out of control Fernande really is. As time goes on the confining walls of control will need more and more help from the martinis to keep them in check and from exploding outwards.

Fernande enjoys the theatre as a place of escape. It transports her to different worlds, allowing her to leave her troubled world behind. She tells her sisters:

> I love the theatre. I love its mystery, its ceremony. I love coming into the theatre, to take my place and feel the red curtain move...Ah! Those few seconds suspended in darkness, then the theatre would lift her skirts to reveal her secrets! And such beautiful secrets! The theatre would open its mouth to subjugate us, amaze us, transport us, because its mouth was a source of joy! I've ridden on the wings of the theatre for almost twenty years. And all I saw was admirable! All that I heard was beautiful. And I'd nourish myself for days on the substance of what had been granted me. (30)

This is the theatre of the past - the realistic, traditional type of theatre. Theatre, for Fernande, must not challenge an audience, but should serve as escapist entertainment. This is the theatre of the early 1950's, an era Fernande terms "the golden age of the Outremont intelligentsia." Like everything else, however, drama must be controlled, and must follow the rules. The revolutionary theatre of the late 1960's and 1970's, of Tremblay and Dube, does not interest Fernande in the least. She complains:

> The era of the sinks and back alleys should be over! Ten years is long enough! I don't want the whole world thinking everyone here speaks joual. There are other things in this country besides foul-mouthed bingo players. (31)

The present-day theatre confronts Fernande with an ugly, albeit realistic, stage picture. It is not controlled by conventions or rules, and its major function is to expose and inform, not to carry its audience away to faraway lands with foreign heroes. Theatre has changed, and it no longer provides Fernande with a safe and satisfactory escape.

Writing and dramatics were the two art forms chosen by Madame Beaugrand for Fernande. Like her sisters, Fernande lost the courage to actively pursue her love of art. Like Yvette, however, she still secretly practises her art form, writing, but only in the confines and privacy of her own home. When left alone onstage, Fernande faces the audience and reveals her passion for writing and her cowardice in openly expressing it:

> To find myself alone. To savour the magic moment when I find myself, before blank page...the instant I take up my pen...Ha! How pathetic! I should spit on all those years...tons of paper!...My attic floor is caving in beneath the tons of paper I've blackened for twenty-five years, blackened in silence, instead of letting them burst out into sunlight as they deserve. Pure cowardice. Me, too! For fear of what

> people would say. For fear of losing my place in my milieu...I've been writing for twenty-five years, letters I've never sent. Passionate letters, impassionate letters, declarations of love, declarations of war, reconciliations, threats, vows, lies, too, but beautiful ones, superb, exquisite lies! From the age of twenty-five, I have lived vicariously. I drive away the passionless beings that surround me, to set down my own passions, too great for my entourage, on reams of paper that I hide. (32)

Like her sisters, Fernande blames her mother for leaving her helpless and afraid to fail.

> To turn back the clock and to fight, instead of letting myself drown in the sea of prejudice which engulfs me and has become the ruling force of my life. To say 'No' to that narrow-minded mother whose memory I pretend to respect, to strangle her contempt with my bare hands, to open her eyes with a knife and to scream at her: 'Life is not a series of antiseptic gestures; life is not a social tea; life is not a living room where every gesture is a cheat, where every spoken word hides ten more left unsaid! Life is out there!' Then to get out! To publish! Because if I wanted to...if I wanted to... if only I had the panache and courage to stand up after all these years of silence, to amaze the world with the frustrated riches that lie within me. (33)

Buried deep underneath that cold exterior a wonderfully passionate being does indeed exist. Fernande hates the intimidation and hemmed-in feeling that her stratum of society has imposed on her life. Unbridled passions have no place in a social circle dominated by rules and controlled manners. Much more firmly entrenched in the style of life in which she was raised than her sisters, Fernande seeks an escape from this spiritless world through her secret writing sessions.

Lorraine Ferzetti is the fourth sister, the one who got out. Lorraine married the family gardener, an Italian man, and now lives, much to Fernande's chagrin, in the Italian district of Montreal, St. Leonard. Lorraine has acquired by her marriage a large, loving family, and has left behind much of the emotional baggage heaped on her by her mother. She is the sister who achieved a degree of satisfaction and contentment. Unlike Fernande, Lorraine, when she married, eliminated Beaugrand from her name. (Fernande uses Fernande Beaugrand-Drapeau.) She wanted no reminders of her troubled past.

Like her sisters, Lorraine was pushed by their mother to concentrate her attentions on an artistic endeavour; for Lorraine it was the piano. At the beginning of Act Two, Lorraine is seated on the piano bench, facing the audience. Of her past she remembers:

> I, too, was led to believe by someone I hated that I had talent. But I wised up sooner than my two older sisters and I reacted faster than the younger one. The years I spent here in this living room, practicing my scales; it's left a taste like sour milk in my mouth. All I ever knew of this room was the piece of carved walnut that stared me in the face whenever I raised my eyes from the keyboard...I adored the piano until they made me afraid of it with my supposed talent. As long as my lessons weren't serious, I was happy. But when my adolescence rolled around, when my hands finally became untied, when my good mother began to knit her brow, like a connoisseur, the minute I'd sit down at the

> piano I felt this enormous weight on my chest. And when people would talk to me about talent, I wanted to scream and run away....(34)

Lorraine recalls the moment she gave up the piano:

> Anyway, I could already see mother shutting the piano on my fingers. Sure enough, one evening, after a particularly brilliant recital, right here, with tout l'Outremont transported with enthusiasm, and in the unexpected presence of an influential music critic, Mother came and sat beside me on the bench. I looked her right in the eye, signaled her to say nothing, and I said: 'Don't worry, Mother, I won't.' And I closed the piano lid myself, quietly, without another word. It was less painful than having my fingers smashed. (35)

Lorraine walked away from the piano, feeling a certain sting, in the years to come, whenever she looked at it. She loathed music for years. Lorraine was quicker to react to her mother than either Lucille or Yvette; she ran away with the gardener to escape the tyranny and claustrophobic nature that permeated their Outremont home.

In Tremblay's previous plays, men and marriage have not proven successful escape vehicles for women. Lorraine proves to be an exception to the rule. She was looking to get out, and Guido, the gardener, answered her prayers. Of her successful flight Lorraine recalls:

> Guido came into my life, like a dagger thrust cleanly into the heart, making a beautiful wound that's clear, frank, precise! Freedom! An open window! Honesty! Guido's honesty, after all those years of curtsies, bows, kissing hands; of 'Have-you-heard?'...I was

> carried off, like in a cloak and dagger movie, practically out of my bedroom window. My prince charming had an accent to make you shudder and nothing in his hand but a rake, but God he was beautiful and I loved him...I almost left Outremont on the seat of a tractor, to become what sister Fernande calls common, as she holds her nose, but what I call real, laughing, singing, and tapping my feet. (36)

Since escaping Outremont, Lorraine has had a satisfying life. She loves her family and is secure in the choices she made earlier in life. She stands up to Fernande's whippings and constant put-downs, matching her insult for insult. In one instance, she points out to Fernande that Fernande is still trapped:

> Well, that's how it is Fernande, when you marry the man, you marry the territory. I married on the other side of Avenue du Parc; and you, on the other side of Cote Sainte Catherine! The way you see it, you've gone up and I've gone down. The way I see it, I got out and you got trapped. (37)

Lucille agrees with Lorraine, seeing her as the one who managed to free herself. She tells Fernande:

> We're all useless, Fernande, because we gave up too soon. You as much as the others. And you know it as well as I. Perhaps Lorraine saved herself, but one out of four isn't a very good average. (38)

Unlike Fernande, Lorraine never speaks badly of her husband, children, or home life. Beside Lorraine's escape, Fernande's scale upwards through marriage is seen to be hollow and unsuccessful.

Lorraine is not stuck in the past as she is much more open to life than Fernande. She has a healthy acceptance of new art forms and a respect for young artists. She explains to Fernande:

> What you call noise may be music for someone else, and you have no say in it. Instead of condemning other people's noise, why not try to understand what they have to say, try listening to who it comes from, where it comes from, and why it exists....It's true, you know, what you find beautiful is so antiseptic, so disinfected, so sterile. (39)

Lorraine's rejection of her upbringing and move away from Outremont has allowed her to free herself from all the insecurities and fears that still affect her sisters. Lorraine has no complex about making mistakes in public or at failing. She openly laughs at the large, ridiculous birthday cake she has brought for Lucille She is a burst of energy when she first enters, and a welcome one to her sisters Yvette and Lucille.

Tremblay uses Lorraine, and to an extent Lucille, as his spokeswomen representing his world and his views. Up until Lorraine's first entrance the action is static. Yvette has listened to her aria, "Remember Me" and Fernande has quibbled over the suitability and proper use of certain words. Lorraine enters, brimming with energy and out of breath, with her birthday cake for Lucille. Lorraine is the New World, the world of the working class, and she comes boldly crashing into the old world, the Outremont living room, the hypocritical world of the outdated bourgeoisie.

Tremblay differentiates Lorraine from the others by having her speak in a French bordering on "joual". Fernande remarks on Lorraine's speech, pointing out how vulgar she has become:

> I'm overjoyed, Lorraine, that you have finally found a way to express yourself in life...Before she married, Lorraine wasn't at all out-going. Now she offends the ear, but at least she expresses herself. So, good for her and too bad for us...Do your kids pick up their joual in the mud and then spew it out in your living room? Bravo! Next thing we know, you'll be swearing...You're already an offence to the eyes and ears. Launch an attack on the other three senses and you'll be one hundred percent vulgar. (40)

Lorraine counters with: "I'd rather be noisy and healthy than discreet and constipated." (41) Lorraine's speech is not clouded with flowery adjectives and hidden agendas, nor is it hindered by the search for perfect grammar. Her "joual" is alive and vigorous; it is a stark contrast to Fernande's impeccably refined French. The translator of The Impromptu of Outremont, John Van Burek, has captured the difference between Lorraine's speech and Fernande's speech in his translation into English. Lorraine's French "joual" translates into sloppy, slightly lower-class English. She says things like: "Can you believe it, they screwed up..." or "I'd shove the frigging thing...."; "You're going to" becomes "You're gonna". A lot of her sentences end with "eh?"; "'em" is substituted for the word "them". Fernande speaks in gramatically correct sentences with no slang or lazy speech habits. Tremblay illustrates, through Lorraine's language, that in her escape from Outremont, she has left her former language -- proper diction and correct grammar -- behind.

An upper-class Outremont living room represented a new milieu for Tremblay to set a play. His previous work had been set in kitchens or in a symbolic fashion with characters on simple undefined platforms, highlighted by lighting. The Beaugrand living room, however, carries with it a very disturbing cell-like image. There is a heavy suggestion of confinement in the set. The drapes are always drawn because sunlight tires Yvette. The windows are shut, so no fresh air can come in. Fernande remarks on the condition of the living room:

> I see it's as dark as ever in here!
> Why don't you do what I've suggested,
> have sheer curtains installed? The
> air doesn't circulate...It smells so
> musty when you come in. (42)

The piano and other furniture is exactly where it was when the girls were growing up. Lucille and Yvette have their own chairs - everything in the room has a specific order.

Fernande has financial control over the family house, and acts as landlord to Yvette and Lucille. Lucille argues that Fernande enjoys this position of authority, and enjoys keeping them under her control. Fernande is like a warden to her two prisoners, Yvette and Lucille, and they make no attempt to escape. The sterility of the cell-like room enhances the themes of imprisonment and entrapment which Tremblay explores in this play.

The living room is a microcosm of its surrounding outside world. Like the living room, the outside world of Outremont has an order to it as well. The richer people live in the larger houses at the top of the hill, in upper Outremont, looking down on the less wealthy in the smaller houses at the bottom. In this upper-class world, the glory of the "golden past" is fondly remembered and its return is longed for. Everything had its proper place in the past - nothing was challenging or threatening; art was beautiful and was admired from a distance. Just as the drapes of the Beaugrand living room do not let in any light and protect the home from the changing outside world, so the small world of Outremont does not let in any new art forms or controversial ideas; it chooses to shut itself off to protect itself.

The present condition of the Beaugrand living room, as presented on the stage, directly undercuts what it used to be like as described by Fernande:

> Do you remember how dazzling this room used to be? And bright? And gay? The sun poured in in the summer, and in the winter, we'd bathe in the milky light of the snow. We didn't close the windows till late in the evening, and they'd be opened in the morning as soon as one of us set foot outside her bedroom. This room was the heart of the house. It's

> soul. We lived here. We were happy here....(43)

The living room, with its closed windows, drawn drapes, and musty chairs, has fallen on tattered times. It is no longer dazzling and gay, but dark and depressing. Tremblay again uses this room to comment on the broader world. Just as the "golden past" of this room has faded, so has the "golden past" of Outremont. The demise of the Outremont intelligentsia is visually communicated to an audience through the play's set.

When each sister performs her monologue, she is left alone in this cold room, surrounded by memories that still, to a large extent, control the present. Lorraine has escaped her fate while the other three sisters are still heavily affected by this room, its surroundings and the world it represents. The thematic contents of these emotional monologues are physically enhanced by having these walls from the past loom in on the women.

In Act Two of The Impromptu of Outremont, Fernande outlines her philosophy on theatre. She describes why she goes to the theatre and what she likes to see there. She goes to the theatre to escape. She likes to witness lives from worlds outside of her realm of existence:

> I've ridden on the wings of the theatre for almost twenty years, from the Venice of the Doges to the bloody England of Elizabeth, from la noble France to Spain, proud and sombre. And when the curtain fell after those fleeting hours of

> boundless happiness, my heart would stop, my life held captive behind the red velvet curtain. (44)

Fernande wants to be transported away to foreign lands to watch stories of heroes far removed from the audience and their current lives. In direct contrast, she continues by outlining the state of the present day theatre and does not hide her derisive view of it:

> But today, for the most part, especially in the so-called 'new culture', the curtain doesn't even exist. Fini, the sacred mystery! Fini, the voyage of initiation! You walk into a theatre and the set hits you in the face! If the actors aren't there already waiting for you, mumbling their text or staring out at you, as if the characters in a play could see you! Yet, you haven't paid to be looked at, you've paid to look! And when the play begins, they provoke you, insult you, cover you in filth!...The theatre is no longer a lady who surrenders herself out of need. She's a whore out to make a buck any way she can! Nothing is too vile, nothing too ugly, too low. The poor spectator is lured into the theatre and trapped there like a rat. They've even done away with intermission. And they shout in your face using language that would make your hair stand on end...It's time for the theatre to get out of the kitchen and go back to the living room. The era of the sink and back alleys should be over. Ten years is long enough! Too long. (45)

The style of theatre upheld as "real theatre" by Fernande and her contemporaries is the exact type of theatre from which Tremblay broke away.

The plays of Moliere and Shakespeare have little relevance to the present day conditions of the Quebecois working-class. Tremblay writes about the kitchen sink, back alley, and foul-mouthed bingo players (*Les Belles Soeurs*). His characters stare out at the audience, look at them, address them. His characters do use foul language, and *Bonjour, là, Bonjour* does not have an intermission. He uses the exact style of theatre disdainfully described by Fernande to confront his audience. A heightened realistic stage picture, Tremblay hopes, will provide an impetus for change, for people to rise above their "maudite vie plate" and plow forward. Fernande, in the second passage, is outlining a style of theatre employed by the playwright who created her and used throughout this play. She is scornfully highlighting methods of staging that *The Impromptu of Outremont* uses to great effect. Through Fernande's speech Tremblay has created a bit of self-mockery. He further defends his style of theatre by successfully employing it throughout the play. For example, Fernande, near the end of the play, is left alone on the stage, and, in fact, does exactly what she says she hates to see in the theatre: she looks out at the audience and addresses them. This speech undercuts everything she had said about theatre earlier in the play. Her monologue performs a function that she despises in the new-age theatre. It reveals the bare truth about the emotional sterility that has dominated this woman's life. It does not carry the audience away to a fantasy land, nor is it sparkled with beautiful language. Through the combination of Fernande's "theatre speech" with her self-revealing monologue, Tremblay forces a different class of people than those of rue Fabre to confront themselves openly.

The real "Fernandes" of Outremont who paid top dollar to sit in the orchestra seats of le Théâtre du Nouveau Monde simply for the social cachet of "catching the latest Tremblay play" received a slap in the face. In the play he is parodying the lifestyle of these Outremont matrons through Fernande. Fernande's onstage words, opinions, and actions, are closely tied to an Outremont/Theatre du Nouveau Monde audience. Tremblay is mocking his audience into a state of self-recognition.

Tremblay's use of setting in *The Impromptu of Outremont* illustrates that his theatre and message do not change just because of the setting. His critics now have a Tremblay play set in an acceptable milieu with recognizable characters, speaking grammatically correct French. Critics who were put off by *Les Belles Soeurs* and his other "kitchen sink dramas" are now forced to understand that his message is far more universal. He has defended himself from within the enemy ranks. His style of staging can also be successfully transported from a highly stylized set of simple platforms (*Bonjour là, Bonjour* or *Damnée Manon, Sacrée Sandra*) to an Outremont parlour, representing the old school of realistic box-set stage design and be equally effective.

Michel Tremblay makes an important point to his Théâtre du Nouveau Monde audience about the use of theatre. Theatre as a tool of escape is obselete. Fernande has abandoned theatre for that very reason, and Tremblay indicates to his audience that they too should stop looking to theatre to provide them with a flimsy escape, as it has a far more valuable function - to educate, enlighten, and bring about change.

As in his previous plays, Michel Tremblay takes full advantage of the direct emotional connection obtained between stage and audience through his direct-address monologues. Three of the four Beaugrand women have a private stage moment to relate honestly to the audience. The function of these direct-address monologues is to lower guards and shields and to create a trusting bond between stage and audience. An audience feels privileged to be let in on the real side of the chracter; they become more sensitive to the character and more responsive to their concerns. This style of staging, first used by Tremblay in Les Belles Soeurs, has proven to be an effective device in getting across to the audience what characters really want, what they really fear, what they cannot say in front of others. It does not permit the audience to hide in the dark; rather it challenges them head-on. The most radical of the direct-address monologues in this play is found in Fernande. Tremblay has Fernande expose her vulnerability and true passion for the first time while alone onstage, facing the audience. The levels of distrust and the fear of failure that were instilled in Fernande by her mother in this very living room still haunt her. It is the memory of her mother and the emotional damage she caused in her from which Fernande is still trying to escape. The setting Tremblay has chosen for this play still creates uneasiness in Fernande; the memory of her mother pervades it. It is only when she is alone that Fernande can relax, let down her guard, and let her inner frustration and pain come pouring out. Her honesty is doubly poignant to this audience made up of people who resemble herself.

Like Yvette and Fernande, Tremblay gives Lorraine a monologue, spoken to the audience, while alone onstage. Lorraine's monologue is performed while she is sitting on a piano bench. When she fled her Outremont home to marry Guido, Lorraine still harbored an intense hatred for music, and especially for the piano. She had spent hours and hours at this piano staring at its wood and keyboard. When the lid to the keyboard was closed during her adolescence by her mother, Lorraine could not get far enough away from it. Tremblay wisely places Lorraine in this setting for her monologue, thus allowing the audience to imagine her twenty-five years earlier - an adolescent Lorraine in the same living room, seated at the same piano. They can imagine the rising levels of frustration and hatred she harbored for her mother. The calm and rational manner used by the adult Lorraine in the telling of this story from her past undercuts the original feelings of pain and anxiety that she actually felt at the time as an adolescent. Her monologue is interspersed with laughter - a laughter one experiences when looking back at the past and seeing how truly unimportant, in the large scheme of life, that one tragic moment really was. Twenty-five years later, Lorraine is able to tell her story using an almost detached tone. Unlike Yvette, who is still suffering from the effects of her mother stamping out her hopes of becoming an opera star, Lorraine has moved on. Her story of being pushed by her mother is like her sister's, but in Lorraine's case the scars have healed. Her escape has given her time, distance, and a healthy acceptance of her past. She now plays the piano, which she does in the play, and no longer harbors a strong resentment towards it or her mother.

Lorraine brings light back into the cell-like Beaugrand living room. During her monologue, she rushes to the curtains and flings them open. The outside world has been shut out for too long and the living room has become stifling and musty. Lorraine yells: "When Lorraine Ferzetti returns to Outremont, it's time to let in the light." (46) and Tremblay has her do just that. The present world, its changes and challenges, are fighting to get in and flush out the old hypocrisy and bourgeois standards. Lorraine's escape into a middle-class world that is volatile and vibrant allows her to bring this vibrancy back to her dark past, to the bourgeois Outremont, in an attempt to lighten it. The physical action of her throwing the drapes open to let in light and air underlines the thematic concern of boldly bringing on to the stage, and into the Beaugrand living room, this new and vital social ideology.

Similar in nature to his past work the solitary staging of the women's monologues enhances themes of isolation and loneliness. These four women are sisters, family, and yet they cannot communicate. When a woman is most honest, she is alone - separated emotionally and physically from those who have known her the longest and should be the closest to her.

For the final image of the play, Tremblay has the four sisters onstage singing. In the middle of a measure, the women freeze. For about ten seconds, a burst of machine gun fire is heard. In Tremblay's mind, the death of this aristocratic, staunchly mannered, and superior-minded class is on the horizon. With its demise the new Quebecois artistic vision, as created by Tremblay and his contemporaries, focusing on current issues and the people of Quebec, will come to the foreground and dominate the cultural scene of the province. Tremblay has created a strong visual warning to all those theatre patrons seated in the expensive front row seats of le Théâtre du Nouveau Monde.

ENDNOTES

[1] Ray Conlogue, "Tremblay is a Playwright in Search of a Soul," *The Globe and Mail*, 3 March 1979, p. 16.

[2] Sid Adilman, "Tremblay is no Longer 'the Nasty Boy from Quebec," *The Toronto Star*, 14 January 1978, sec. D, p.3.

[3] Alan Twigg, *For Openers: Conversations with Twenty-Four Canadian Writers* (Harbour: Madiera Park, 1981), p. 155.

[4] Lisbie Rae, "Tremblay at P'tit Bonheur, 1982-1985," *Canadian Drama/L'Art Dramatique Canadien* 13. 1. (1987), p. 3.

[5] *Ibid*., p. 3.

[6] Michel Tremblay, *The Impromptu of Outremont*, trans. John Van Burek (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1981), p. 22

[7] *Ibid*., p. 57.

[8] Rae, op. cit., p. 7.

[9] Tremblay, op. cit., p. 10.

[10] *Ibid*., p. 12.

[11] *Ibid*., p. 43.

[12] *Ibid*., pp. 79-80.

[13] *Ibid*., p. 76.

[14] *Ibid*., p. 78.

[15] *Ibid*., p. 79.

[16] *Ibid*., p. 80.

[17] *Ibid*., p. 71.

[18] *Ibid*., p. 22.

[19] *Ibid*., p. 57.

[20] *Ibid*., p. 23.

[21] *Ibid*., p. 20.

[22] Kurt, Adler, gen. ed., *Operatic Anthology. Celebrated Arias from Operas by Old and Modern Composers*, 5 Vols. (New York: G. Schirmer, 1954), Vol. 2: "When I am Laid in Earth," by Henry Purcell, pp. 77-79.

[23] Tremblay, op. cit., p. 44.

[24] *Ibid*., p. 48.

[25] *Ibid*., p. 49.

[26] *Ibid*., p. 27.

[27] *Ibid*., p. 52.

[28] *Ibid*., p. 60.

[29] *Ibid*., pp. 61-62.

[30] *Ibid*., pp. 73-74.

[31] *Ibid*., pp. 74-75.

[32] *Ibid*., p. 81.

[33] *Ibid*., p.- pp. 81-82.

[34] *Ibid*., p. 57.

[35] *Ibid*., pp. 57-58.

[36] *Ibid*., p. 58.

[37] *Ibid*., p. 46.

[38] *Ibid*., p. 80.

[39] *Ibid*., p. 77.

[40] *Ibid*., pp. 46-48.

[41] *Ibid*., p. 47.

[42] *Ibid*., p. 29.

[43] *Ibid*., pp. 69-70.

[44] *Ibid*., pp. 73-74.

[45] *Ibid*., pp. 73-74.

[46] *Ibid*., p. 58.

CHAPTER SIX

ALBERTINE IN FIVE TIMES

Albertine in Five Times marked Tremblay's return to the east end of Montreal and rue Fabre. It is a complex work, looking at a woman's life (Albertine's) at five different stages. Each stage is played by a different actor. Albertine in Five Times premiered at the French language theatre of the National Arts Centre in October 1984. It is based on one of Tremblay's aunts who died in 1985 (1). The play's structure is an intricate maze with each Albertine sharing thoughts, hopes, and memories with herself at different ages. Tremblay has each of the five Albertines onstage at all times and in contact with each other. The multiple perspectives of Albertine, therefore, are on display for an audience's perusal for the entire play. Madeleine, Albertine's sister, acts as a confidante to the five Albertines; she remains ageless throughout.

Albertine at thirty is sitting on the verandah of her mother's house at Duhamel with her sister, Madeleine; the year is 1942. Albertine has come to the country for a week's rest. By thirty, she is already very tired and wanting to escape her life. She pleads to Madeleine:

> Madeleine, I don't want to go back to the city! I know it's impossible, and my kids need me, even if they're terrified of me, and it's only a week's rest 'cause I'm tired...So tired, Madeleine, ...So tired. (2)

Albertine's daughter, Therese, is a wild youngster who

Albertine has trouble controling. Marcel, her son, is a retarded boy who retreats further and further into himself. Her husband, Gabriel, is no help in raising the family. Albertine's mother, with whom she does not get along, also lives with her. With her week of rest in the country ending, Albertine is dreading her return to rue Fabre. The bleak reality of "la maudite vie plate" looms at the end of her week like a black pit waiting to swallow her up.

Albertine at thirty is trying very hard to escape from the inner rage constantly present in her. She cannot stifle or purge it, so she tries to run away from it by ignoring it. This rage is self-destructive and eats away at her like a poison. She describes it to Madeleine:

> I have this huge force inside me, Madeleine. I have a power in me, that scares me....To destroy....I didn't ask for it. It's there. If I hadn't been so miserable, I might have forgotten it or conquered it, but there are times....times when I feel....this rage. Yes rage Madeleine. I'm crazy with rage. If I could explode,....But I'll never explode.... If only you knew, Madeleine, it hurts so much. (3)

Coaxed by Albertine at forty to talk about her rage, Albertine at thirty continues, finally revealing the incident that brought her to the house in Duhamel.

> My rage wants to strike out. Even if I scream, if I hit people, it's still there....even after I've calmed down....I'm young, I'm strong, I could do so much if it weren't for this rage, gnawing at me. (4)

When Albertine discovers her eleven-year-old daughter is seeing a grown man, she loses all control.

> My child, my own daughter, Therese.... Believe it or not, she was seeing a man. A man, Madeleine, not some brat her own age, but a grown man....Did you ever want to destroy everything around you? Did you ever feel you had enough strength to destroy everything?....Naturally I found out by accident. I was lying on the sofa the other day....Therese came to sit on the balcony with her friend Pierette. Pierette asked Therese if she'd seen her gent lately.... And when Therese started talking about the last time she saw him, how he got down on his knees in front of her on the street, how he put his head on....on her belly, I got up, not knowing what I was doing, and went out on the balcony.....and I started to hit her, Madeleine.... I didn't know where I was hitting. I just hit her as hard as I could....and I didn't stop....I couldn't. It wasn't just Therese I was hitting, it was my whole life....I couldn't find the words to explain the anger, so I just hit. I didn't cry, Madeleine. Not once. And I still can't. (5)

The germ of "la maudite vie plate", and the rage it produces, is lodged deep inside of Albertine and refuses to be purged. This rage paralyzes Albertine. She cannot communicate with her children, she can only scream at them; nor can she show them affection or offer them guidance. Even after a physical lashing out in which Albertine is striking at her whole life, the worm of her rage is still present. Release through force has not proven successful for Albertine.

The five Albertines alternately describe the scene of Albertine's discovery of Therese's secret man friend, and all five say the line: "And I started to hit her, Madeleine." This moment is so painful that each of the five Albertines remembers it with great clarity. As with the women of Les Belles Soeurs, Tremblay at times uses the five Albertines as a chorus. They comment on the action of the play and on each other's lives and respective choices. "And I started to hit her, Madeleine" is more powerful and has a strong and alarming impact on an audience when spoken by five voices instead of one. The emotional strength and volume command attention. This use of a chorus also ties the rage to each of the five Albertines and illustrates to an audience, both aurally and visually, that this line of rage has continued through Albertine's whole life.

A good portion of Albertine's rage is tied to her bitterness about her lot in life, and more generally the lot women are handed in this world. She explains to Madeleine:

> Our role! It's not our role. It's our lot. I know, your lot's better than mine, but....don't you feel you're in a hole, Madeleine, a tunnel, a cage?....In ten, twenty years, we'll still be here in our cages with bars. And when we're old, when they don't need us anymore, they'll put us in cages for old women. (6)

When talking of Therese, Albertine at thirty states:

> Before you know it she'll be a woman, cooped up like the rest of us. Or cast out like the lepers...Did it ever strike you, Madeleine, with all your brains, that those are your only choices?....If I were younger I'd look for a third choice....That's what I'll tell Therese. (7)

The choices of escape for women from Albertine's station in life are minimal; either tie oneself down to a man and family or run away to the Main and be disowned. Albertine feels cheated and wants desperately to uncover other choices. The dye has been cast, however, and at the young age of thirty the time for any real escape has passed her by. When she says to Madeleine, "In ten, twenty years, we'll still be here in our cages, with bars", she is dead right. Tremblay has placed the older Albertines on stage for this very reason. Indeed, the audience is able to glance around the stage and see Albertine at forty, fifty, and sixty (ten and twenty years later) and witness the depressing reality that they are in fact still in cages with bars. Besides not having the emotional courage or support to escape from her inevitable fate, Albertine at thirty is physically hemmed in by her empty future with Albertine at forty, fifty, sixty, and seventy onstage beside her. There is nowhere to go, nowhere to run to; no choice that she can make as a character at thirty that will alter the course of her life. Tremblay has, through the staging, placed her depressing future right before her eyes for an audience to see. The bright ray of hope seen by an audience in Albertine at thirty is quickly extinguished when witnessing her at forty and sixty.

For a brief week, Albertine at thirty has been allowed to escape to the country. Under Madeleine's care and soothing companionship, Albertine lets part of her inner rage and bitterness fly away. Madeleine advises Albertine: "Forget the city, mother, your problems. Enjoy your vacation. Empty your head." (8) She breathes in the fresh air, and like a child, wonders at nature's beauty and peacefulness. When she takes a deep breath she says: "It smells so good it hurts!....I don't have words to describe it....It's too good." (9) In this warm setting she pretends to be happy and almost believes it. She lets herself escape fully into a moment in time where she is perfectly content and at peace with herself. She fantasizes with Madeleine:

> I'd like to be far away from the house right now....Maybe on top of that mountain....From up there, the house must look tiny....Close your eyes, try to imagine that's where we are.... Can you see it, way down below? A flicker of light, shining on the edge of night....It looks so peaceful from a distance. Two women on a verandah. I wonder what they're talking about? They look so happy. Both of them.... Shall we visit them? Maybe they can tell us their secret....You know it already, but I.... (10)

For an instant Albertine at thirty believes in this placid picture of tranquility. She is not afraid of the dark, as she is in the city, but rather finds it inviting and comforting. She wants to take herself to an observer's viewpoint so she can catch a glimpse of herself as happy and content. She needs to be outside of herself to witness these positive moments and thus really believe in them. In the staging, the older Albertines take on this observer role, as described by Albertine at thirty. Tremblay has the four older Albertines observing their younger counterpart and Madeleine on the verandah and remembering that one peaceful week long ago. Albertine at sixty watches herself at thirty breathing in the country air and sadly realizes that she can no longer remember its smell. Albertine at thirty still has a chance to do things differently. "We all depend on you" (11), Albertine at seventy tells Albertine at thirty.

The older Albertines look at their past self and hope that somehow, some way, Albertine at thirty will make different decisions and choices and thus escape the fate she seems predetermined to follow. The audience sides with the older Albertines in the role of sympathetic and hopeful observer. The illusion of free choice exists in Albertine at thirty; she has options before her that can pull her out of "la maudite vie plate". With the older Albertines physically present on the stage, however, an audience witnesses that free choice is but an illusion and Albertine, by thirty, is locked into a predetermined path. For the audience, then, there exists a conflict between what seems to be possible for Albertine at thirty, who is right there directly in front of them, and the fact that her life is already determined for her. The slight optimism expressed in Albertine at thirty is directly undercut by the presence of Albertine at forty right beside her. The poignancy is created for an audience by juxtaposing the youth and naivete of Albertine at thirty against the bitterness and rage of Albertine at forty and sixty.

In terms of staging, Tremblay sets Albertine at thirty on a verandah in the country. Albertine remarks how large the world seems to her in the country; its unlimited sky and boundless territory:

> In the city I'm never aware the world exists, so vast....overwhelming. In the city, the world seems small. In the city the world doesn't exist. (12)

6

> You'd think we were alone in the world, just the two of us. (13)

She does not feel trapped in the country as she does in the city. In the country her rage can dissipate slightly because of the open, calming, surroundings. In the city, however, her rage has nowhere to go, but stays pent up inside of her, building in intensity and feeding off itself.

Albertine at forty is an angry, bitter woman trapped in "la maudite vie plate" in her house on rue Fabre. It is 1952, and Albertine is a widow. She lives with her mother and troubled children. Her days have turned into screaming matches with her daughter and her mother. The calm, rational thought process used by the younger Albertine to achieve some self-understanding has vanished. Any hope for change that had existed in Albertine at thirty has been extinguished. Her being has been taken over by rage, frustration, and anger.

Albertine at forty makes no attempt to escape from her daily existence. She complains to Madeleine:

> You don't know what it's like, to feel alone in a house full of people! Nobody listens to me because I'm always screaming and I'm always screaming because nobody listens....I run after Marcel to protect him, and I run after Therese to stop her from getting into worse trouble than the day before. And I yell louder at mother than the day before. (14)
>
> When Therese shows up in the morning, bruised, drunk, trying to butter me up because she feels guilty, but still being a smart-ass 'cause it's the only way she can show her independence, how can I cry? I scream. She screams back, I scream louder, then mother joins in....If the three of us stood face to face, screaming our heads off, it would have precisely the same effect. We don't listen to what anyone's saying, we listen to ourselves scream. (15)
>
> La rue Fabre, the kids, the family....Dear God, I'm fed up. (16)

The bickering, the screaming, the anger - there is no escape from this vicious circle. The words of Albertine at forty illustrate that the cycle of "la maudite vie plate" continues; the rage is passed on from one generation of women to the next.

The inner rage that Albertine at thirty experienced has become much larger and darker in Albertine at forty. Albertine can no longer even cry about her situation in life. When she tries, all that comes out is a scream. The screaming, however, only provides a temporary release. She tells Madeleine:

> I'm fed up, fed up with always being in a rage....My heart is bursting with things that are so ugly, if you only knew....(17)
>
> It's like a ball of fire, Madeleine....Yes a ball of fire in my chest....that never stops burning....Sometimes it hurts so much I can't do a thing....I have to lie down on the bed....but then it gets worse. (18)

At forty Albertine calls herself a "screaming nut in a strait jacket" (19). This image, chosen by Tremblay, accurately sums up her existence. She is tightly hemmed in with no chance of breaking out. All of the immense anger and frustration simply turns inwards, as it has no outlet, and continues to fuel the blinding rage burning inside of her.

Albertine at forty views men as a dead-end tunnel. They do not constitute a successful escape route from "la maudite vie plate"; rather they are a trap that push women deeper and deeper into a hellish existence. Albertine married a man she calls a buffoon and a moron. At forty she sums up her attitude towards men:

> She's right, men are all the same, they get us every time. They're in control, what do you expect? As long as we let them, they take advantage. 'Cause they're not idiots. It's their world, they made it.... That's it, that's men in a nutshell: they find a hole, they stick it in. (20)

Albertine at thirty outlined the two choices women have in this life: marry a man and get put in cage, or run away and be treated like a whore by the family. At thirty, she was searching for a positive third choice to pass onto Therese. She wanted her daughter to have more options to choose from than she had. Albertine at forty warns Therese to stay away from men. They will simply provide her with a short-term solution that will soon turn into another problem from which she must escape.

Albertine, however, has not provided for Therese that third choice for women that she had spoken of at thirty. It is too late now for the twenty-year-old Therese, as she has ignored her mother's advice and already attached herself to a man - the same man who almost raped her ten years before. The hope Albertine at thirty had for her daughter, in terms of choices and options, is instantly destroyed by the picture of Therese described by Albertine at forty. Albertine at forty watches her daughter leave home for a man and land directly in the middle of the same trap that so many women blindly choose time and time again.

Albertine at seventy reveals to Madeleine what would have been a comforting release for her at forty. Albertine at forty needed to be hugged and stroked. She needed to fall into someone's caring arms and feel their support, strength, and love. Albertine at seventy, in reference to herself at forty, tells Madeleine:

> You know what I wanted you to do, Madeleine?

> No, not what I wanted, I don't think I wanted it....but what you should have done....It wasn't discussion I wanted...we had that day in and day out....no, I needed you to put your arms around me, to hold me.... (21)

Albertine at forty shudders at the very idea of physical contact, saying she does not need to be held, but Albertine at fifty and seventy boldly tell her that, in retrospect, that is exactly what she needed at the time, for it would have helped ease some of the rage burning inside of her. They wisely suggest to her this possible tiny escape that would come from within. She must make the first move, though; it is up to her to reach out to Madeleine for physical affection. This advice falls on deaf ears, however, as Albertine at forty has yet to acquire the same experience and self-knowledge that the older Albertines possess. An audience too can see how some warm and loving physical contact would help Albertine at forty. They have the benefit, however, of an immediate visual understanding of the past and future.

Whereas Albertine at thirty is on a large verandah in the open country, Albertine at forty is rocking on the tiny claustrophobic balcony of her house on rue Fabre. The balcony is like a single cell housed within the larger prison represented by rue Fabre. Albertine at forty reveals: "I suffocate in the dark....like the world's closing in on me." (22) Physically the world is closing in on her. Rue Fabre, as depicted by Tremblay, is a street of lower-class row housing, bursting at the seams with large families. Privacy is nowhere to be found. Rage, anger, and disappointment filter through the homes of rue Fabre like a plague. There is nowhere for Albertine at forty to escape, emotionally or physically. Tremblay puts her on this small cage-like balcony to reinforce his theme of entrapment.

Albertine at fifty, fed up with "la maudite vie plate" and exhausted, makes a strong decision to sever all ties to her past. She puts her emotionally disturbed son, Marcel, in a home, and stops bailing Therese out of trouble. She starts a fresh life, alone, working in a restaurant at parc Lafontaine, taking on a breezy air and positive outlook. She explains to Madeleine the rationale behind her decision and the benefits that have occurred:

> I discovered that to make yourself heard in this life, you have to disobey. If you really want something, you disobey, otherwise you get crushed. I always listened to others, took their advice, did what they wanted....No kidding, if someone didn't tell me what to do, I asked. I begged! There I was, stuck in a houseful of people, and I couldn't budge until someone said it was okay. And all that did was feed my rage....I was always about to explode. But at the age of fifty I thought, don't ask any more. Disobey. Try it once. Find out if it works....I didn't stick to my role Madeleine, I disobeyed.... I broke the mould. I stopped being mother hen....I told Therese I'd have nothing more to do with her....and I had Marcel put away, far from here....It hurt, but you want to know the truth? I've never been happier in my life.... When it was over, and I'd done it, and I found myself alone, it was incredible. A feeling I'd

> never known. My days were mine, no one to worry about....and I went out to find a job. A job. Freedom! (23)

Albertine at fifty concludes:

> I come here singing in the morning, I sing while I work, and I go home singing at night. I earn my living. I live as I please without family on my back, without kids, without men! And I'm happy. I held myself back too long Madeleine. (24)

Albertine at fifty has escaped her emotionally barren existence by ignoring her past and shutting out anything or anybody that has caused her pain or discomfort. She has escaped into parc Lafontaine, a relatively large expanse of green park in the east end of Montreal. The park provides her with a fantasy world in which she can be someone else and where no one knows of her troubled past. The back sheds of rue Fabre block out the summer sunsets, but the open space of parc Lafontaine allows Albertine at fifty to observe the beautiful sunsets. Albertine at fifty has rebelled, and with her past and future facing her (and us) onstage, Tremblay comments on the degree of success this escape from her past has truly proven to be. Like Albertine at thirty, Albertine at fifty's optimistic outlook is marred by the onstage presence of herself a decade later. The audience cannot fully rejoice in this scheme of escape proposed by Albertine at fifty, as they view, in the same glance, the self-destructive image of Albertine at sixty. Albertine at fifty presents a touchingly sad portrait to the audience. Her happiness, for them, is undercut and tinged with a degree of darkness.

Albertine at fifty explains to Albertine at seventy how to make up a life filled with happy moments and how to ignore bad memories which intrude on one's tranquil existence:

> If it's not clear....make it up. If the past is too painful, invent a new one.... Do what I did, forget! At least try. You'll see it's not so hard. When a bad memory tries to get me I shake it off....If I'm in the house, I get out....If I'm at work, I sing....I turn my back on it, leave it behind. (25)

She says to Albertine at forty: "I wish I'd never been like you." (26) Tremblay points out, however, that she had been like Albertine at forty, at one point in her life, and that she cannot run away from this past; its influence can be seen in the future. A past must be recognized, accepted, and reconciled with the present. Albertine at sixty provides a glimpse into the future for Albertine at fifty. Albertine at sixty warns her younger self: "You're play acting. You're going through a phase where you play at being happy and positive." (27) Albertine at fifty ignores the warnings and makes no attempt to acknowledge her past. A make-believe world with an invented past does not provide a long-term escape for Albertine. The simple, dream-like world that she invents at fifty comes shattering down when the news of her daughter's death forces her to confront past mistakes and wrong turns.

Albertine at fifty has only to look at herself at sixty to witness the long-range effects resulting from her chosen escape route. Albertine at sixty warns Albertine at fifty:

> I fooled myself for awhile. I thought things would be okay....I went my own way, thinking the rest of the world wouldn't follow, but it did....Oh yes, it followed!....Hang on to your illusions as long as you can....gain time, it's running out fast.... (28)
>
> If you're so naive and think that your life depends on you alone, too bad for you. You want to believe you have a choice, that you can choose to be free? Fine! Go right ahead! Let me know how it feels when the word comes crashing down around you, when you feel yourself alone with nothing but guilt staring you in the face. Because that's the way we've always been had, and still we don't learn. (29)

The time of happiness is quickly running out for Albertine at fifty. Within the next decade, she will be faced with Therese's bloody death and all the guilt that ensues. Because of her decisions at fifty, Albertine at sixty exists the way she is. Her decisions at fifty were made, however, because of how she was at forty. Her future is looming straight ahead and confronting her (and us) with all of its anger, bitterness, and incredible feelings of guilt.

In terms of staging, Tremblay physically manifests the conflict arising in Albertine at fifty. A thematic issue - her unsuccessful escape through an avoidance of her past -

is illustrated onstage by having Albertine at thirty and forty onstage beside Albertine at fifty, commenting on her actions. Her past is therefore physically present onstage. Emotionally, a past cannot be ignored, nor can it be physically ignored in this play. As hard as she may work to try to obliterate this past, it is always there on the stage as a strong reminder for an audience and her other selves to view. The rage and the frustration embodied in Albertine at forty cannot successfully dissipate into the calm, tranquil state of Albertine at fifty. Try as she may, she cannot shed her past. The consequences of her choices made at fifty are staring her straight on in Albertine at sixty. Albertine at fifty is living a lie and an audience sees the long-range results of these lies in their observation of Albertine at sixty. If her method of coping and escape had been successful, Albertine at sixty would look and act very different. By placing the two side by side, the visual contrast to an audience is alarming.

Albertine at fifty is in parc Lafontaine for the duration of the play. To illustrate her newfound freedom and temporary contentment, Tremblay puts Albertine at fifty in an open space to complement this emotional state. Parc Lafontaine is her fantasy land. Hemmed in on her tiny balcony on rue Fabre would not suit Albertine at fifty's emotional make-up. Albertine at fifty connects with herself again at thirty in her enjoyment of the open sky and brilliant sunsets. Just as she did on the verandah in Duhamel in 1942, Albertine, at parc Lafontaine in 1962, soaks in the large dark expanse of a star filled summer sky. Parc Lafontaine is surrounded by a large city, Montreal, and is close to rue Fabre. It is, in fact, in the larger picture, a relatively tiny green area on the congested island of Montreal - a small oasis tightly surrounded by a large city infringing on its edges. As the surrounding city is to the park, however, Albertine's past, her rage, and her future are looming just outside her newfound tranquility, waiting to crash in on her and destroy the false happiness she has created for herself. As long as she keeps up the facade, keeps in parc Lafontaine, her newly-created world is safe. When reality finally sets in, when the real world catches up to her, it happens in the form of knock on the door of her house on rue Fabre - outside of the protective parc Lafontaine.

Albertine at sixty has sunk into a deep depression succumbing to the agony of her life. She stays in the bedroom of her house on rue Fabre taking tranquilizers to numb her pain and block out the rage that has returned. Cynical and bitter, she resembles herself more at forty than at fifty. Filled with self-destructive anger and guilt, Albertine at sixty feels she is paying the price for the few years of illusory happiness she enjoyed a decade ago.

Like Monique in Bonjour, là, Bonjour, Albertine at sixty looks to tranquilizers as an escape route. The rage, which Albertine at fifty said would pass, has returned; pills temporarily blot out this rage for Albertine. At sixty, she says:

> It never does any good to rebel....It's childish to rebel. The punishment is always too great....And when the rage comes back....Words....can't describe the impotence of rage....I'm resigned to it....You can never get away, never! (30)

When Albertine at sixty first enters the stage, her method of coping is instantly visible. She goes to her bedside table and takes a pill from a plastic container without even checking the label. Tremblay's stage directions indicate that she pops pills at fairly frequent intervals. Albertine at sixty describes the calming effect the tranquilizers provide:

> Look....my hands are shaking....my mouth's dry....but I can't take another yet. I have to wait half an hour....or it'll make me sick....But if you only knew how good it feels....when I don't overdo it. They're wonderful, these things, you know. They.... lighten you is how the doctor described it.... I don't feel that knot in my throat, the weight on my heart....I can breathe freely....(31)

When telling why she needs the pills, she states:

> Sometimes I have no choice....It's that or insanity....I feel it coming....I can see Therese....Marcel too, who's drifted away for good....The world explodes! Rage comes back! (32)

The guilt she feels about abandoning Therese and Therese's subsequent bloody death plagues Albertine. The young rage that was present in her at thirty and reached such a bitter stage at forty is now making her physically ill. By examining the same character at five stages, and placing each onstage for the duration of the play, Tremblay allows an audience to witness the growth of this rage. He notes its beginning and follows it throughout Albertine's life, marking its development at each age. An audience therefore can easily understand how she got to this sad state at sixty. Albertine at sixty needs pills to free herself from the rage and guilt gnawing inside of her, but the pills prove to be an unsuccessful answer.

Suicide through an overdose of tranquilizers presents itself as a possible escape plan to Albertine at sixty. Albertine at seventy tells of the night she took too many pills and how she was barely revived. She warns Albertine at sixty to stay away from tranquilizers: "One day....or rather one night...the guilt will be too much...you'll take one too many...." (33) Albertine at sixty replies: "Good! I'm glad! You never know, the door may lead to some place bearable. It can't be worse than here!" (34) Suicide is a definite option in the mind of Albertine at sixty.

Albertine at sixty, unable to face the outside world, shuts herself up in her bedroom. Albertine feels safe in this little room where she alone has control. She is free from outside forces and protected from any causes that might feed her inner rage. Of her existence she remarks:

> Must smell like a tomb in here. I don't dare open the window though, I'll catch my death.... I've shut myself up in the house where I was born....hell....in one room of the house....to protect myself from the smell outside. Nothing can touch me now....(35)

To Madeleine, her sister, she says: "I took your advice....I stay quiet in my room, I don't bother a soul...." (36) Albertine at sixty is running away from reality. Her bedroom is like a cell with bars which protect her from the outside world; nothing can get in, but at the same time nothing can get out. She is emotionally trapped in this house with all of its unpleasant history and dark secrets; forty years of bad memories continue then to haunt her.

Tremblay wisely chooses the physical location for Albertine at sixty. Designed as a cell, and compared to a tomb, the physical surroundings of her bedroom on rue Fabre enhance the thematic concerns of Albertine at sixty. Haunted by a troubled past and emotionally neutered by a burning rage, Albertine is physically trapped in this confining room. The room does not allow for any space to really breathe nor the freedom to work off some of the frustration lodged inside of her. An emotional rage is pent up in her, while, physically, she is pent up in this small room. Albertine at sixty becomes a hermit, allowing past emotions to surround her and to feed her inner rage.

Albertine at sixty is guilty of the exact crime she accused Albertine at fifty of committing. Albertine at sixty faulted Albertine at fifty for creating a new life for herself and for abandoning her children; she said it was only a matter of time before her past caught up with her. She mocked Albertine at fifty's upbeat and positive outlook warning her to enjoy while she could. She laughed at her singing and kept reminding her that this new life was based solely on delusion. Ironically, Albertine at sixty's life is also based on delusion, a delusion of a different bent. She cannot face many of the elements of her life so she hides in a room, drugged. She does not reconcile her past nor does she even truthfully face the present. She too avoids reality, but has chosen a different path.

Emotionally, Albertine at sixty is closest to Albertine at forty. They share the same inner frustration and burning rage. They are bitter and cynical in their outlook on life. They are the last of the Albertines to speak at the beginning of the play, and both use a negative harsh tone. While Albertine at thirty, fifty, and seventy look to the moon as a symbol of hope, Albertine at forty and sixty view it as something cold and distant. In reference to the moon, Albertine at sixty focuses on man's first trip to the moon, saying it was rigged and filmed on a movie set. She concludes: "There's enough misery here without looking for it elsewhere." (37) Albertine at forty complains: "And it's cold on the moon, I don't like being cold." (38) They do not share the other Albertine's love for the moon; they are not drawn in by its beauty or hopeful and romantic image.

Albertine at forty and sixty both shudder at the idea of physical contact with others. As Madeleine attempts to hug Albertine at forty, Albertine jumps back: "Don't touch me! Leave me alone." (39) Albertine at sixty comments on physical closeness:

> At times, I sort of remember....physical contact. I mean my head remembers. And it's so revolting. I thank my stars I don't know a soul any more. (40)

Following her rage at forty, and the suppression of it at fifty, the audience views the unfortunate results of this combination in Albertine at sixty. Albertine at forty and sixty complement each other and provide support for each other. If one had existed without the other, the stretch of character from the other three Albertines would have been great. With both onstage, they validate each other and bring to the foreground central parts of Albertine's character. Tremblay uses them to contrast the three others and to poignantly point up the happier moments of the play. Albertine at thirty's tranquil emotional state is that much more fragile when an audience can view what becomes of her in later years. Albertine at fifty's fantasy world is tinged with a dark edge and has a definite time constraint on it as Albertine at sixty provides the audience with the depressing picture of the near future.

Different though she may be, and despised by the other Albertines, except perhaps Albertine at forty, Tremblay must find a device to link Albertine at sixty to the other Albertines and show that she is indeed part of the whole picture of one woman. He finds his linking device in the motion of rocking. The opening of the play finds Albertine at thirty in a rocking chair on the verandah at the house in Duhamel, Albertine at forty in a rocking chair on the balcony of her house on rue Fabre, and Albertine at seventy in a rocking chair in a home for the elderly. Albertine at sixty begins the play, sitting on her bed, rocking side to side. It is this image of rocking that provides the audience with a clear visual connection that links the five Albertines and subtly indicates to them that they are indeed watching one woman at five stages of her life.

Albertine at seventy is the final picture of this woman's life. The past and its many parts, as represented by the four younger Albertines, all add up to equal Albertine at seventy. She has come to a home for the elderly to live out her final years.

Albertine at sixty, as told by Albertine at seventy, took an overdose of sleeping pills; whether it was an accident or a deliberate attempt at suicide, Tremblay does not say. At the beginning of the play, Albertine at seventy talks of the healing process:

> I've come back from a long way off. Six months ago I was dead. It's true! They cracked three ribs reviving me. Crazy, huh? Every time I think about it I can't help laughing. Though its hardly funny. But what the heck, it's better to laugh than whine about it til you die....a second time. (41)

The positive outlook of Albertine at seventy and her calm emotional state greatly contrasts that of Albertine at forty and sixty. Albertine at seventy accepts her former selves and does not try to reject or block out parts of her life. She laughs at her brush with death in a healthy manner. Having sunk to the lowest depths of an existence dominated by guilt, hatred, rage, and fear, Albertine at seventy has emerged a wise, tender woman who is balanced and, finally, at peace with herself. She tells her younger self: "Now that it's over, I'm glad to be back. Because things are better. I've got peace. Because here I'll be fine." (42) Albertine at seventy has worked very hard to overcome her brush with death and to lift her life out of the gutter. She tells Albertine at sixty: "I've changed a lot....I've read stuff. Now I've got new glasses, I can see, I keep informed. I understand things." (43) She is looking outwards at the world and getting involved with it; she is not hiding from it in old musty rooms.

Albertine has achieved a type of inner peace by acknowledging her past, accepting it, and working through it. "Don't kid yourself", she says, "I remember....I remember everything....For the last few months that's all I've had to do is remember." (44) She knows she cannot rebel nor run away from her past, for memories and consequences from past actions are always there to catch up. She looks fondly on Albertine at thirty, hoping that somehow she will make different choices which will make for a better life to follow. She understands Albertine at fifty's desire to abandon her hellish existence. She pushes Albertine at sixty to tell the story of Therese's death so she can face the horrible past, and by vocalizing it, perhaps work through its painful memory. When feeling low, Albertine at seventy cries: "No, I musn't give in to despair....Help me!" (45) She is actively working to keep herself strong and in control, responsible for her own destiny.

The rage and frustration have dissipated in a subdued Albertine at seventy. She no longer blames men for her lot in life, nor her children, nor her mother. She has come to the conclusion that neither pills, nor anger, nor ignoring responsiblities will provide a successful escape. The key to Albertine's escape, an escape from all the rage and frustration that has tormented her for over forty years, is directly facing her onstage. A successful escape comes from within. No outside force can truly change the course of an individual's life. The one person Albertine has been able to depend on throughout her life is herself. She is the constant one, the one that always remains, the one who has survived. At seventy she has learned to turn to herself to gain an escape; she is the only party who can release all the rage and frustration that have been gnawing away inside of her for so many years. The strength for the ultimate escape has come from within.

Albertine, moreover, is her own worst enemy. What stood in the way of her escape until seventy was her own self. As is the case with so many of Tremblay's characters, she inwardly blamed herself and felt guilty for so many things that turned sour and went wrong in her life. Until she could forgive herself and make peace with herself she was permanently tied down to a troubled past and this weight prevented her from obtaining a successful escape. She experienced so much self-loathing that she did not look to herself to gain an escape from "la maudite vie plate". She considered outside options. At seventy, with her whole life before her eyes, she finally stops whipping herself and forgives herself. This forgiveness liberates her. It gives her the freedom to let go of all that rage and guilt, and achieve the inner emotional tranquility for which she blindly fought her whole life. In the end, Tremblay remarks, what is left is the self. In the staging of the play, Tremblay boldly places Albertine's past directly before her. Besides an emotional reconciliation, he physically forces her to confront, eye to eye, her demons and come to terms with her past and all of the ensuing consequences. Once she can embrace her former selves, acknowledge and accept them on an honest level, then she is able to move forward to a fresh and liberating existence. She must understand what is at the root of "la maudite vie plate" - the worm that has caused her so much unhappiness. Albertine at seventy is on her way to a tranquil and emotionally balanced inner state. She is ready to die now, peacefully, having reconciled herself to her life. She says to herself:

> Not many people can say they've died twice, that's for sure! Mind you, after my second time, I won't be telling anybody anything. I doubt if you come back from the dead more than once. Anyway, when I go back again, I'll be very happy to stay. (46)

Margaret Penman notes of the play:

> But it is also evocative and lyrical, opening up to speak of all women in all the times of their lives. It's a hard lot, womanhood - life itself - but there are moments which lift it out of misery to something like glory. (47)

Albertine at seventy has lifted herself out of her misery and obtained an inner glory filled with triumph. Tremblay describes her at the outset of the play as a woman who "speaks in short choppy sentences. She has that carefree tone of someone returning from afar. A sprightly old lady." (48) An independent woman, Albertine at seventy is a celebration of one woman's successful escape from an emotionally and spiritually barren "maudite vie plate".

The sense of wholeness, of a wheel turned full circle, in Albertine in Five Times is achieved not only through Tremblay's exporation of theme, but also in the staging of the play. Albertine at thirty must be connected to Albertine at seventy to complete the life cycle. Physically, a connection is drawn between the two from the outset of the play. Albertine at seventy and Albertine at thirty, in the first moments of the play, rock in tandem and in rhythm to each other. Albertine at thirty waves at Albertine at seventy and they share a laugh. Tremblay has Albertine at thirty and seventy speak certain lines in unison thus linking them vocally. Madeleine offers Albertine at thirty a glass of hot milk from which Albertine at seventy also drinks, sharing the same glass. As Albertine at thirty finishes her milk in one swallow, Albertine at seventy makes the gesture of lifting the cup to her lips. Albertine at thirty is still young and naive, and has yet to face the real hardships which lie ahead. Albertine at seventy has lived through the hardships and has emerged from the forty years leaving behind the guilt and rage that festered inside of her for decades. With Albertine at thirty being the beginning of the journey, and Albertine at seventy being the end, Tremblay takes us through the cycle of a woman's life making sure to connect both the beginning and the end pieces by tying them together emotionally, physically, and vocally. Tremblay has set up these parallels as a reminder to an audience that they are watching the same woman at five different stages of her life and not five different women at one stage.

With each Albertine on stage, Tremblay allows an audience to view integral parts of her character and how they alter and shift through time. Albertine at seventy sums up the choices she made at different stages of her life:

> Mind you....there's no point in asking people to change....When you're young you think you're right....When you get older you realize you were wrong....What's the point of it all? We should have the right to a second life.... but we're so badly made....I doubt we'd do any better. (49)

Even with the future visibly before her the younger Albertines will make the same decisions and follow the same path. They feel they are doing the right thing, at the time, even with the older Albertines stepping in and warning them they are wrong. The younger ones, however, do not have the benefit of the life experience or knowledge that the older ones possess.

To unify the Albertines at the end of the play, to put five voices into one, Tremblay has the last line of the play spoken in unison by all five Albertines. Physically, he achieves a complementary effect through staging by having the five Albertines slowly raise their arms toward the moon. Albertine at seventy says: "Touch it....maybe it's the same one...." (50) The word, "Ahh" is then spoken together as if they had made physical contact. They are bonded together through their mutual contact with the moon. Each part of Albertine, each age, has been, in the final moment of the play, physically and emotionally linked to form the whole portrait of one woman.

ENDNOTES

[1] Robert Crew, "The Real World of Michel Tremblay," *The Toronto Star*, 21 May 1988, sec D, p. 1.

[2] Michel Tremblay, *Albertine in Five Times*, trans. John Van Burek and Bill Glassco (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1986), p. 25.

[3] *Ibid*., pp. 36-38.

[4] *Ibid*., pp. 40-45.

[5] *Ibid*., pp. 46-49.

[6] *Ibid*., p. 38.

[7] *Ibid*., p. 59.

[8] *Ibid*., p. 26.

[9] *Ibid*., pp. 20-21.

[10] *Ibid*., p. 65.

[11] *Ibid*., p. 51.

[12] *Ibid*., pp. 65-66.

[13] *Ibid*., p. 37.

[14] *Ibid*., p. 30.

[15] *Ibid*., p. 66.

[16] *Ibid*., p. 19.

[17] *Ibid*., p. 30.

[18] *Ibid*., p. 43.

[19] *Ibid*., p. 36.

[20] *Ibid*., pp. 60-61.

[21] *Ibid*., p. 33.

[22] *Ibid*., p. 66.

[23] *Ibid*., pp. 53-55.

[24] *Ibid*., p. 56.

[25] *Ibid*., p. 42.

[26] *Ibid*., p. 26.

[27] *Ibid*., p. 45.

[28] *Ibid*., p. 70.

[29] *Ibid*., p. 72.

[30] *Ibid*., pp. 40-42.

[31] *Ibid*., p. 70.

[32] *Ibid*., p. 72.

[33] *Ibid.*, p. 73.

[34] *Ibid.*, p. 73.

[35] *Ibid.*, p. 23.

[36] *Ibid.*, p. 44.

[37] *Ibid.*, p. 18.

[38] *Ibid.*, p. 18.

[39] *Ibid.*, p. 33.

[40] *Ibid.*, p. 34.

[41] *Ibid.*, p. 8.

[42] *Ibid.*, p. 9.

[43] *Ibid.*, p. 8.

[44] *Ibid.*, p. 13.

[45] *Ibid.*, p. 40.

[46] *Ibid.*, pp. 8-9.

[47] Lisbie Rae, "Tremblay at P'tit Bonheur, 1982-1985," *Canadian Drama/L'Art Dramatique Canadien* 13. 1. (1987), p. 19.

[48] Tremblay, op. cit., p. 7.

[49] *Ibid.*, p. 51.

[50] *Ibid.*, p. 75.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSION

After twenty-three years of writing Michel Tremblay is still fighting for the world of rue Fabre. He continues to push audiences to take action against their repression and to insist on their right to determine their own destiny. In La Maison Suspendue (1990), Albertine at forty returns as a character still fighting to escape her rage-filled existence. Tremblay says he writes in order to change things:

> If you write, it's because you think you have something to say, and saying this thing will help the world change. You don't write so that the world stays the same. That is stupid. (1)

Throughout his work Tremblay has explored, in depth, the fight for self-acceptance. In Albertine in Five Times, Albertine at seventy achieves the level of self-acceptance for which all of his past female characters searched. Albertine at seventy discovers Tremblay's secret: the ultimate escape comes from the self; in life there is no other. Happiness is not an absolute; contentment with oneself and with one's life is the greatest freedom one can achieve.

While the content of Michel Tremblay's work has continued to focus on the theme of escape, the form has been an ongoing exploration and experimentation with different styles of presentation. Tremblay has used physical staging to great advantage to comment on the action of his plays. He has employed realistic settings in *Les Belles Soeurs* and *The Impromptu of Outremont*, while opting for simple and symbolic settings for *Damnée Manon, Sacrée Sandra* and *Bonjour, là, Bonjour*. Setting and lights work as effective physical agents to underline and highlight Tremblay's themes and ideas. The style of presentation and staging of the plays work in tandem as effective dramaturgical agents to convey Tremblay's message to an audience.

When looking over the whole canon of Tremblay's work, it is interesting to note how he has developed and refined his dramaturgy. Various dramaturgical devices and forms of expression seen in early plays appear later, slightly altered and reinterpreted. Tremblay is forever playing with different ways of expressing character and theme. He experiments with voice, time, image, character depiction, and character/audience relationship in the hope that his message will be made clearer to an audience. Just as physical presentation is closely tied to the content of a Tremblay play, so are the dramaturgical devices he employs. Together, everything works to create the strongest possible impact on an audience.

In *Les Belles Soeurs* there are fifteen women onstage. Tremblay does not create in-depth character sketches in this play, but rather paints his creations with very broad strokes. The women are distinctive on the surface, but an audience sees only one side of each of them. Besides a need to win contests and acquire possessions, little else is known of Germaine Lauzon. A crush on a travelling salesman and a strong need for love is all that is revealed of Des-Neiges Verrette. In much of his early work Tremblay contrived different characters to represent different aspects of experience. To illustrate bonds between two or more characters he has certain women speak lines in unison, like a chorus, to link their experience. These choral odes serve to reveal the whole group, rather than only one specific character. Tremblay employed the direct-address monologue for the first time in his career in Les Belles Soeurs. This device frequently appears in later plays, but in Les Belles Soeurs these monologues reveal to an audience only one aspect of the character. When the character returns to the action of the play from her monologue, an audience learns little more about her. Tremblay, at the beginning of his writing, needed each of these fifteen women in his play to express all of his many observations. Such was not the case in later plays.

In Bonjour, là, Bonjour Tremblay experimented with turning two characters into one voice. Albertine and Charlotte are regarded as essentially the same person. They complete each other's lines, echo each other, and speak in the same rhythm and tone. They are like two birds, perched above, mimicking each other. Tremblay again employs a choral technique, this time to link Albertine and Charlotte. Their common voice expresses his observations of the older generation of rue Fabre and how they too are searching for a way out.

In *Damnée Manon, Sacrée Sandra* Tremblay experimented further with the emotional and physical linkage of characters. Sandra and Manon are two polarized characters from previous plays. In *Damnée Manon, Sacrée Sandra*, their opposite emotional needs are juxtaposed to contrast each other. However, at the end of the play Tremblay blends the two characters into one. Their separate voices and souls join together and return to the author's psyche. Sandra and Manon may be polar opposites, but Tremblay insists they exist in each of us. In our psyche, or in our soul, these two emotional needs, something to believe (Manon) and someone to love (Sandra), exist; hopefully they blend to create a balanced whole. In this way, the "two voice/one character" dramaturgical device employed by Tremblay achieved its most successful expression in *Damnée Manon, Sacrée Sandra*.

In *Damnée Manon, Sacrée Sandra* Tremblay depended upon a strong bond between actor and audience. In past plays, characters spoke to the audience and then returned to the action. In *Damnée Manon, Sacrée Sandra*, Manon and Sandra address the audience for the entire play. The audience is constantly confronted in a direct manner with the action of the play, becoming an almost silent third character, a listener. They are not given a respite until the end, when Sandra turns to face Manon. This was a change for Tremblay who demanded, in this instance, that the audience be an increasingly active part of the play.

The Impromptu of Outremont is staged in a realistic setting and employs the direct-address monologue. At the time of its writing Tremblay was much more experienced and his writing had matured; he was better able to exploit the full potential of certain dramaturgical devices. The direct-address monologue was more successful and more refined in this instance than it had been in Les Belles Soeurs as it fleshed out each of the characters. It did more than merely impart one kernel of knowledge, as it had done in the past. When Fernande is in a scene with her sisters, the audience learns she is an alcoholic, unhappily married, a racist, a bad mother, and a miser. In her monologue, they witness an emotional dimension that can be added to what they have already garnered from previous scenes, expanding their understanding of the character. In The Impromptu of Outremont, Tremblay creates four women instead of fifteen. Each of the Beaugrand sisters embodies more than one trait. They are more interesting women than those in Les Belles Soeurs, because they are more developed. All of the observations Tremblay wants to get across to his audience in this play can be embodied in these four multi-faceted characters. Tremblay had grown beyond the "single character representing a single observation" method he had used in Les Belles Soeurs.

In Albertine in Five Times Tremblay altered and multiplied the "two voice/one character" device he employed in Damnée Manon, Sacrée Sandra. In Albertine in Five Times he turns five voices into one. Unlike Damnée Manon, Sacrée Sandra, however, an audience is aware from the beginning that they are watching the same person split into five components; all incarnations of the same character. A highly refined device, Tremblay arrived at using a single character to express all of his observations about life on rue Fabre and the people who live under the daily cloud of "la maudite vie plate". He no longer required fifteen women to put forward all of his points. An audience has a stronger emotional connection when they are involved with one character rather than fifteen. In Albertine in Five Times Tremblay sketched his most in-depth character to date. An audience witnesses first hand the forty-year progression of one woman's life on rue Fabre. They watch the growth, the pain, and the changes Albertine undergoes from decade to decade. They see the promise in Albertine at thirty and its demise in Albertine at forty and sixty. Because the audience is made to feel that they have lived the character's life alongside her, there exists a closer character/audience relationship.

This strong dramaturgical device makes it impossible to ignore Tremblay's assertion that the past has a strong bearing on the present and the future.

So many of Tremblay's past characters are closely tied to one of the Albertines. It is easy to imagine a young Rose of _Les Belles Soeurs_ similar to Albertine at thirty. Sandra's persistent role-playing in _Damnée Manon, Sacrée Sandra_ is akin to Albertine at fifty. Monique's past from _Bonjour, là, Bonjour_ may be better understood by examining Albertine at sixty and her past.

With each play, Michel Tremblay exposes the traps into which people continue to fall. Not enough people fight in this world. They simply accept what is handed to them. A decade ago Tremblay stated: "I am here to denounce injustice, and I have a feeling that's what I am going to be doing for the rest of my days." (2) Tremblay has remained true to this statement.

Michel Tremblay wants to make his message of successful escape effectively clear to audiences and he continues to present it in various lights - thematically, dramaturgically, and theatrically. To escape injustice, people must first learn to depend on themselves in this world. Change for the better, Tremblay advocates, comes from within. In the end, for Tremblay's women, and by extension his audience, all that is left is the self. Only through acceptance of self is successful escape possible.

ENDNOTES

[1] Mark Gerson, "The Indelible Mark of Michel Tremblay's Theatre," Performing Arts in Canada 18. 4. (1981), p. 25.

[2] Renate Usmiani, "Where to Begin the Accusation," Canadian Theatre Review 24. (1979), p. 37.

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